

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO

The native speaker of English – A clash of conceptualisations

*A comparative analysis of self-ascribed and non-elective native/non-native
English speaker identity*

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract</p> <p>The native speaker is a contentious linguistic concept, and since there has yet to be a consensus on its definition, the perspectives surrounding the concept are diverse and sometimes conflicting. This is nowhere more visible than in the debate on the native English speaker (NES). Countries such as the USA, Canada, UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand are unquestionably considered home to NESs; however, the population of some Caribbean countries also speaks English as their first language, and furthermore, today's ESL (English as a second language) countries contain an increasing number of people for whom English is a dominant language in their everyday life.</p> <p>The unfamiliarity of most laypeople with the complexity of the NES concept can thus lead to misconceptions of some speakers' NES identity, as well as to linguistic discrimination. The main aim of this study, therefore, has been to explore native and non-native English speaker (NNES) identity constructs from both a personal perspective (self-ascribed identity) and a societal one (non-elective identity). These were subsequently compared and contrasted in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the most significant linguistic and social factors for different NES conceptualisations.</p> <p>Since previous research on the concept predominantly focused only on one perspective or definition of the NES, this study has taken a more complex approach, by utilising two distinct datasets and methods. The method used to explore self-ascribed NES/NNES identities was a formal interview, which explored the interviewees' social and linguistic background as well as their views on the native speaker concept. The non-elective NES constructs were analysed through a survey, which contained audio samples of the interviewees' spoken English. These samples were played to Finnish university students, who were then asked to classify individual speakers as NES or NNES, to rate their accent, vocabulary, grammar, confidence and intelligibility, and to guess the speakers' origin. The significance of the speech factors and the perceived country/area of origin in predicting NES classification was first explored through comparative data charts, after which it was statistically analysed by using a binary logistic regression model in SPSS.</p> <p>Results revealed discrepancies between self-ascribed and non-elective NES identity, and several instances proved particularly significant: Firstly, in the case of an EFL (English as a foreign language) speaker who had never lived in an English-speaking country, the fact that she possessed an American accent contributed greatly to her being largely considered a NES. Secondly, a speaker whose mother tongue and dominant language was English, but who was from the Caribbean and thus possessed a "foreign-sounding" accent, was third lowest in being classified as a NES. Thirdly, speakers from ESL countries were lowest in NES classification despite personally identifying as NES.</p> <p>Considering that the statistical analysis indicated speakers' accent and perceived origin to be the most significant predictors of NES classification, it can be concluded that a native English speaker is still being conceptualised primarily as someone who comes from a dominant English-speaking country and thus possesses a relevant accent. Persons from any lesser-known English-speaking countries and ESL countries therefore sound "foreign", become excluded from this concept, and may find their NES identity challenged.</p>			
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1 INTRODUCTION

The native speaker is an elusive and complex concept which is by most individuals taken at face value without further questioning. Everyone seems to intrinsically possess a fixed idea of what or who a native speaker is; however, if we were to more closely investigate their conceptualisations of the term, we would encounter a plethora of different perspectives. Furthermore, “a native speaker of English” may mean different things to different people. For most laypeople, a native English speaker constitutes someone who has been born in an English-speaking country and has grown up using English as their first language. For cognitive linguists, a native English speaker is often synonymous with a person who has unquestionable language competence in English and who possesses internalised knowledge of the English grammar.

However, largely depending on the context of its usage, the native speaker concept may be defined in various ways, and these varying conceptualisations sometimes come into conflict with each other. The conflicts usually arise due to the fact that the native speaker concept is analysed only from the perspective of the subject/speaker, of the observer/listener, or that of an outside analyst.

In previous studies on the native speaker concept, it has been an all too common occurrence that researchers enter the study with a rigid existing definition of a native speaker and then attempt to discover whether people fit that definition or not. Conversely, this study starts by setting aside definitions, and it will rather construct them by working in reverse from the results. The conceptualisation of a native English speaker will thus arise from observing the factors which most strongly contributed to the construction of the concept.

Very few studies have attempted to combine several research methods, datasets and participant groups in order to come to a better understanding of the native (English) speaker concept, and the absence of such rigor is one of the main motivations behind this study. Its principal idea is to compare and contrast two conceptualisations of the native English speaker. The first is a conceptualisation produced by self-identifying native and non-native English speakers, and the second is one produced by outside respondents, in this case university students in Finland.

The English speakers, who come from a variety of social and geographical backgrounds, were interviewed with the goal of investigating their context-dependent social conceptualisation of the native English speaker, while the conceptualisations produced by lay university students were analysed using a survey which contained audio samples of the interviewees' spoken English..

To summarise, the aim of this Master's thesis study is to provide a more comprehensive picture of the linguistic and social factors which are most important in conceptualising a native English speaker. Furthermore, the study explores specifically which factors are important for which people, and it offers ground for further discussion and research of the sociolinguistic implications of the matter.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THE NATIVE SPEAKER

The native speaker concept, as previously mentioned, holds different significance for different people. If one uses the term “native speaker” or “native English speaker” as a search query in a research database, the results which surface are predominantly studies which use the native speaker as a measure or a factor against which something is compared, or according to which something is measured. For the most part, this includes either comparisons of non-native and native English speakers in their English use (Shirato 2007, Genç 2013) or discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of native and non-native teachers of English (Cook 1999, Braine 2005). The latter studies sometimes do look at the concept of the native speaker itself and question its validity (Lee 2005, Ahn 2011, Mariño 2011), but none of these have attempted to make this problematic the central point of their study. It does in fact prove to be much more challenging if one tries to investigate what significance the native speaker concept holds for people, as well as how it functions in a sociolinguistic context, e.g. with regard to linguistic identity, language stereotypes or language discrimination.

2.1.1 Terminological disarray and overlapping

The terminology surrounding the native speaker concept may appear confusing, even to skilled linguists. Frequently, the confusion stems from there being a number of similar concepts which are often used interchangeably with the native speaker, such as having a specific language as a mother tongue and/or first language. Furthermore, there is disagreement as to how bilingual or multilingual speakers ought to be classified - whether

they can be considered native speakers of more than one language, or whether they are native speakers of any language at all.

Historically, Leonard Bloomfield (1933) was the first to provide a written definition of a native speaker: "The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language." (p. 43) His definition can nowadays be equated to both the concept of mother tongue and first language, i.e. "the language which was learned first ... the language ('tongue') you learned from your mother, biological or not." (Davies 2003, p.17). For a person with limited knowledge of linguistics, even so much as conducting an Internet search of such concepts can result in confusion, since Wikipedia, for example, redirects both "native speaker" or "mother tongue" inquiries to an article named *First Language*.

To the discussion of mother tongues and first languages, Davies (2003) also adds the terms "dominant language" and "home language" (p. 20), which do not necessarily entail that the language was acquired first, and therefore are to some degree more flexible. Braj Kachru (1982), on the other hand, makes a simple claim that "the whole mystique of native speaker and mother tongue should probably be quietly dropped from the linguists' set of professional myths." (p. vii)

Further complications arise when we consider second language, bilingual and multilingual speakers. Bilingualism or multilingualism is, in the majority of contemporary countries, more commonly a rule than an exception, and the idea that monolingualism is the norm is a staple only in culturally and linguistically homogenous societies. What Davies (2003) argues is that anyone can be a native speaker of more than one language, provided that they are adequately exposed to the languages before a critical age (Usually agreed to be around age 9).

However, the question which stems from this discussion becomes one of competence. No one genuinely doubts that a person is able speak two or more languages fluently; however, the doubt lies on whether that person has "competence" in all of them, only one, or none. This issue, and its connection to the native speaker concept are addressed in the next section.

2.1.2 Native speaker as the ideal

The concept of a native speaker, as every linguist knows, is often defined as an individual who has an 'insight' into a specific language or enjoys an 'intuitive' sense of what is grammatical and ungrammatical with regard to language use; someone whose native instincts qualify them to be a touchstone or arbiter on linguistic matters relating to their language, especially if they are an 'educated native speaker.' (Paikeday 1985, p. 26)

The entire arena of language studies changed in the 1960s with the dawn of cognitive linguistics, or more specifically, with the wide recognition of Noam Chomsky's work. The native speaker is an important part of Chomsky's linguistic theory, and the resonating word we find here is "competence". This is something which would become so intrinsically connected to the concept of the native speaker that it is today nearly inseparable from it.

What this entwinement has led to, and has been heavily criticised by Paikeday (1985), is that the native speaker has been put on a pedestal as the one and only authority on their language, and is the one to judge whether a sentence is "grammatical" or not, as well as whether something can be considered a part of their language. However, since the native speaker concept is so elusive, Paikeday rebuts this as being a valid point:

[Chomsky's] native speaker is the criterion of grammaticality.

However, we cannot identify a native speaker. Therefore we cannot ever be sure of the grammaticality of a sentence in a living language.

... There is no real arbiter of grammaticality. Therefore the concept of native speaker as reflected in usages of the term is false. (1985, p. 62)

Nevertheless, the idea of native speaker competence has become so influential that it has had a direct influence on language teaching and language acquisition theory. The general belief is that if an individual wants to acquire a language “properly”, especially if they wish to reproduce a specific native accent, they need to have a native speaker as a teacher or tutor (Canagarajah 1999). This idea, particularly dominant in the teaching of English, was first identified and labelled by Robert Phillipson as “the native speaker fallacy” (1992, p.194) and it is closely connected to concepts of linguistic imperialism and language ownership, which are addressed in the following section.

2.2 THE NATIVE SPEAKER OF ENGLISH

However difficult it is to define the concept of the native speaker in theory, an attempt at defining a native speaker of English causes even further complications. The English language has, due to a number of historical factors, become the language of globalisation, economic power and a *de facto* lingua franca of the modern world. According to statistics presented by David Crystal, the number of people daily exposed to English is over 2 billion. (2013, p.67)

The most conservative estimate is that 329 million people have learnt English as a first language, 430 million as a second language and a further 750 million as a foreign language (Crystal 2013, p.67). These numbers, however, are already very outdated, and unfortunately there is no reliable

system with which to measure the actual number of speakers in any of the categories.

Moreover, the number of native English speakers is impossible to measure because the concept itself is undefined. Among many contentious issues is, for example, whether English-derived pidgins and creoles classify as varieties of English, and subsequently, whether their speakers (approx. 80 million of them) should be included in the calculations (Crystal 2003, p.67). Furthermore, can speakers from countries such as India, Pakistan, Singapore, Nigeria, etc. whose dominant everyday language is English also be considered native speakers? Such issues are the topic for discussion in the next section.

2.2.1 Standards, Colonies and Circles

One of the reasons why native English speaker status is so complex is the aforementioned reach and influence of the English language. With the expansion of the British Empire and its colonizing efforts in North America, Australia, India, Africa and Asia, the language spread beyond the reach of the previously monolingual English-speaking population of the British Isles. (Ireland, Scotland and Wales must of course be partially exempt from this generalisation.)

Nowadays, when we speak about "native English-speaking countries" we ordinarily still refer to the United Kingdom, Ireland, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. According to Hickey (2012), these are the countries in which English has achieved "endonormative stabilisation", i.e. there are set norms for an own national standard of English. These varieties of English are additionally, as Hickey describes them, "exonormative" - meaning that other countries have adopted them as models for their own standard Englishes, as well as to some degree for vocabulary

and pronunciation. Some examples of exonormativity are British English in Nigeria, American English in the Philippines or Australian English in Malaysia.

However, former colonies in which English had been implemented as the language of government, education and upper class have maintained its use for various purposes and in various areas of society. Today, many of these countries use their own derivative varieties of English which are well underway to developing standards of their own, e.g. Standard Kenyan English (Hickey 2012) or Indian English, the latter of which, according to Mesthrie (2010, p. 594), is entering into “the expanding group of Standard Englishes of the world.” Other well-known examples of countries that use the so-called “English as a Second Language”, or ESL, are Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and Singapore.

Even though today’s reality of the English language is, due to globalisation, that of diversification and mutability, it is in human nature to categorise and classify. We can thus take into account Braj Kachru’s (1985) three-circle model as an exemplary representation of how the English language scene is simplified and conceptualised, especially with regard to its socio-political circumstances.

The model’s first and narrowest Inner Circle thus consists of countries wherein the majority of the population are native English speakers in the prototypical sense, i.e. they speak it as a mother tongue and first language (UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and certain Caribbean countries). The Outer Circle incorporates countries where English is used as a second language and has official status; these are the previously mentioned India, Pakistan, Singapore, Philippines, etc. Finally, there is the Expanding Circle, where English is taught as a foreign language (e.g. China, Brazil or most European countries).

However, as Schneider points out, this adds a "sociopolitical and developmental component" (2011, p. 32) to the use of English in countries not belonging to Kachru's Inner Circle, especially in Outer Circle countries. Furthermore, it is this sociopolitical component of English which leads us to another part of the native English speaker debate – the ownership of English.

2.2.2 Language ownership and power

Kachru's model is visibly sociopolitical – even without delving into its contents, the model presents us with the names of the first two circles as being "Inner" and "Outer", thus being "in" or "out" when it comes to possessing power and a type of "copyright" over English.

As Widdowson (1994) informs us, the biggest purists might argue that Oxford or Queen's English is the only correct and valuable variety, while all other "offsprings" are just a lesser version of it – a claim obviously unsustainable in today's world since varieties like American or Australian English are also widely recognised and appreciated. However, a broader version of the aforementioned purist argument still remains at hand – in the present day, instead of being applicable only to Queen's English, the claim of ownership and superiority has been expanded to apply to English varieties of dominant Inner Circle countries, who have their respective standards, and as such supposedly guarantee "quality of clear communication and standards of intelligibility". (Widdowson 1994, p. 379)

Additionally, Widdowson goes on to dispute lexis as an argument of distinction between Standard English and its peripheral varieties – he does this by presenting the example of an Indian English coinage "prepone", as opposed to the standard-accepted "postpone". Even though "prepone" as opposed to "postpone" is completely normal in its derivation, e.g. when compared to the words "predate" and "postdate" which are both a part of Standard English, the Indian English coinage is dismissed as nonstandard.

The difference, Widdowson claims, “lies in the origin of the word. Prepone is coined by a non-native-speaking community, so it is not really a proper English word.” (1994, p. 384)

The introduction of English into today’s ESL territories has been, for better or worse, a consequence of what Phillipson (1992) calls “linguistic imperialism”, i.e. “the dominance of English [being] asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages”. (p. 47) However, an unexpected reverberation of English linguistic imperialism is that the people of ESL countries are now, much as Widdowson describes, reclaiming and using the language for their own social reality, and hence their ownership of English cannot be denied any longer: “Real proficiency is when you are able to take possession of the language, turn it to your advantage, and make it real for you. This is what mastery means.” (1994, p. 384) With the idea of reclaiming English and using it for one’s own social reality, we move into the next section, which deals with the sociolinguistic concept of the speech community.

2.2.3 The speech community

If we place the geopolitical differentiations aside for a moment and focus instead purely on the social aspect of defining a native speaker of a particular language, its stereotypical definition would be as follows:

A native speaker of [a dialect] is someone who grew up in a community of speakers where (i) only [that dialect] was spoken, and (ii) the linguistic behaviour of the individual in question is perceived both by members of that community of speakers, and by the individual him/herself, to be that of a full member. (Escudero and Sharwood Smith 2001, p. 278)

The problem which ensues, however, is how to define this community of speakers. Davies (2003) in fact writes about how the speech community “escapes precise definition” (p. 55) – loosely, its definition involves a group of people who understand each other and have internalised knowledge of how to use the language and what rules they need to follow. Furthermore, they possess is a common understanding of a standard.

We should therefore be able to identify a community of English native speakers – but what happens when the community consists of several levels? Namely, Davies notes the distinction between a patron and a client group, wherein the client group has adopted the patron’s code and claims mutual intelligibility, while the patron group denies it due to negative social attitudes towards the client group. (2003, p.56) This theory could thus arguably be applied to the contentious issue of English use and status in ESL countries, who would in this case represent the client groups, whereas dominant English-speaking countries would be the patron groups. The role that English occupies in ESL communities, as well as in dominant English-speaking countries, is the focus of the section which follows.

2.2.4 Symbolic roles

One might ask why it is that Indians, Filipinos or Nigerians would want to speak English as a native language in the first place, or speak English at home with their children and in doing so disregard their own mother tongues. The answer, Davies (2003) suggests, is in the symbolic role of English language in these countries.

English (and in certain parts of Africa, French) has remained embedded in the local culture as the language of prestige and upper class – these are usually attainable only through education, which is in most of these countries conducted in English. For this reason in particular, “English ...

becomes one, perhaps the only one, of the chief selection devices for entry into selected or prestige schools.” (Davies 2003, p. 63) Furthermore, Phillipson notes the following:

Among a small but growing number of Western educated Africans, the trend is to use English as the language of the home. This was observed in Ghana in the early 1960s ... and has led one East African scholar to predict that ‘By the year 2000 there will probably be more black people in the world who speak English as their *native tongue* than there will be British people’” (1992, p. 27, emphasis in original)

One could therefore draw the conclusion that the number of native English speakers worldwide will nothing but increase in the following years, and as such there is a need to rethink the native speaker concept, with special attention paid to the context of the English language.

2.2.5 Displacing and re-inventing the native speaker concept

The result of the large amount of contradictions and confusion discussed in the sections above is, again, the previously mentioned fact that in reality there is still no clear consensus on what the native speaker concept is and whom it defines. Rajagopalan (2007), for example, argues that the “pure” native speaker is a product of 19th-century imagination, when the approach to classifying most concepts, including the native speaker, was all-or-nothing. With special regard to English, he even goes so far as to argue that “[i]n its emerging role as a world language, English has no native speakers.” (p. 198) The reason which makes “World English” difficult to comprehend, he writes, is that the term defies the classical definition of language as being the claimed property of persons or groups.

With this in mind, some scholars even suggest that the native speaker concept ought to be replaced with other, more fitting definitions. Namely,

M.B.H. Rampton (1990, p. 97) suggests three new concepts – language affiliation, language inheritance and language expertise – to be used for more accurately describing the multiple facets of “language ability and language loyalty”, which are normally all subsumed under the term “native speaker” and may as such lead to confusion.

Returning to Rajagopalan’s argumentation, one of the notable points he makes is that we dwell on the idea of set membership; we define English as distinct from e.g. German or French, and hence we consequently view the speakers of those languages as their respective native speakers. (2007, p. 201) However, according to some scholars, this membership cannot be observed as something set, but it should rather be defined in a more flexible manner which is more appropriate for today’s circumstances.

Escudero and Sharwood Smith (2001), for example, analysed the native speaker concept using Eleanor Rosch’s prototype theory and in doing so, they differentiated between core (prototypical) and peripheral features of the native speaker. They pinpoint the problem of finding a working definition of the native speaker as being due to the fact that there is not even a working definition of language, and that the language attained by a speaker, even if it is their first language, is “neither steady nor final.” (p. 279) Taking this into consideration, it is difficult to gauge how reliable people are at judging themselves to be native speakers, as well as how reliable others are at judging them.

Discussions such as these raise a number of important questions, among which are the following: “[H]ow do we distinguish people who we would like to call ‘very advanced L2 speakers’ or ‘near-natives’ from native speakers who, in some way or another, deviate from the stereotype that we usually have in mind when choosing a model[?]” and “How reliable are people at judging themselves and others to be natives?” (Escudero and

Sharwood Smith 2001, p. 277) We direct our attention to the latter of the two questions in section 2.3.

2.3 NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER IDENTITY AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

Social identity is a multifaceted and complex concept, but it is safe to assume that the language(s) one speaks constitute a major part of it. Namely, Lippi-Green (1997) expresses that “[t]he way individuals situate themselves in relationship to others, the way they group themselves, the powers they claim for themselves and the powers they stipulate to others are all embedded in language.” (p.31) Therefore, being a native speaker of a certain language presumably occupies a large part of a person’s linguistic, personal and social identity. This section aims to introduce theories and previous studies which deal with the construction and perception of specifically native English speaker identity.

2.3.1 Native speaker as a social identity construct

If one places aside the issues of competence and mother tongues, being a native speaker of a language can simply be observed with regard to its social significance. According to Escudero and Sharwood Smith, “[i]t serves as a marker of group identity: being a native speaker signifies much more than having a particular type of language ability range of socio-psychological, cultural, and ethnic characteristics.” (2001, p. 276)

Additionally, if the native speaker status were merely a matter of language competence and/or birthright, the individual would have no control over how they are categorised. The fact of the matter is, as Han (2004) points out, that the individual is the one who decides of which language he/she wishes to be a native speaker. (p. 172)

2.3.2 Native speaker by self-ascription

The aforementioned claim made by Han (2004) stems from one of Davies' (2003) most vocal arguments – that the most important component in one's identity as a native speaker of English, or of any other language, is that this identity needs to be self-ascribed, i.e. that the individual him/herself must claim to be a native speaker:

What is so often meant by native speaker ... is the deliberate exclusion of those who are, in fact, in with a chance of being one. A Singaporean, a Nigerian or an Indian might see him/herself as a native speaker of English but feel a lack of confidence in his/her native speakerness. ... [I]n all such cases it is really up to the individual to identify him/herself; no-one else can do it. (Davies 2003, p. 8)

However, as Han (2004) argues, it is of even higher importance that this self-ascribed native speaker identity be accepted by others. The following section will present studies which have dealt with the problematic raised by Han – the possibilities of discord between a person's self-ascription and others' perception of their native speaker identity.

2.3.3 Native speaker as an non-elective category

On the opposite side of the debate on self-ascribed native speaker identity, some scholars argue that even though native speakership is a constructed category, society is the one constructing it rather than the individual. Brutt-Griffler and Samimy's (2001) study, for example, "suggest[s] that nativeness constitutes a non-elective socially constructed identity rather than a linguistic category." (p. 100) Their study aimed to prove that the native speaker concept is dependent for the most part on preconceived notions of what the speaker needs to look or sound like in order to be considered native.

One of the most illustrative examples appearing in the study is the case of a woman from the Philippines who moved to the US at the age of 21. She had learned English as a first language and used it at home with her family; she can express herself in writing “ONLY in English” (Brutt-Griffler and Samimy 2011, p.101, emphasis original), she has a better spoken and written range in English than in Tagalog, but is nevertheless consistently identified as a non-native speaker in the United States due to her non-American accent.

Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001) suggest that the main component of the identification of English speakers as native or non-native lies in cultural assumptions – most of all in the previously mentioned ideas of language ownership and authority. (Widdowson 1994) The second part of non-native identification, according to the study, is the presence or absence of another national accent, as “national origin appears to constitute one of the prominent elements in the cultural assumptions behind the social construct of the native speaker”. (p. 104) Escudero and Sharwood Smith (2001) also agree that, alongside “having been born and brought up in a relevant language community” (p. 280), accent is a core feature of the native speaker prototype.

Even so, a situation in which an individual is identified as a native or non-native speaker in reality usually becomes one of negotiation and conflicting identifications. The following section will explore the problematic of situations in which a person is a native speaker by self-ascription, but are not accepted as such by others.

2.3.4 Problematicizing the elective – non-elective dichotomy

A 2011 study conducted by Farahnaz Faez represents one of the rare attempts to juxtapose and compare both self-ascribed and non-elective native

English speaker (NES) identity. It observed a group of teacher candidates at a Canadian university, whose linguistic identities were studied through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, and were then compared to the perceptions held by the candidates' instructors, and by a teacher educator previously unfamiliar with the candidates.

Not unexpectedly, the self-ascribed and perceived NES identities clashed on several occasions, the most illustrative case of this being a man who had grown up using Cantonese and Vietnamese until the age of 10, at which point he moved to Canada and started acquiring English. Nowadays he identifies himself as a NES on the basis of feeling "most comfortable" with English and not being able to speak either Vietnamese or Cantonese nearly as well as English. Nevertheless, he was still classified as non-native English speaker (NNES) by all informants.

The examples from Faez's (2011) and Brutt-Griffler and Samimy's (2001) studies show that the native (English) speaker concept is quite possibly a social identity construct much more than a linguistic one, since the informants judged speakers by comparing them to preconceived notions – not necessarily correct ones - of what a NES should sound like. However, the simple NES/NNES dichotomy is proving increasingly inadequate in describing the situation of English speakers in the modern world. People travel, emigrate, and learn English from an ever earlier age. Furthermore, many may have grown up with parents who are from different countries. When these people are faced with the overly simplified binary question of "Are you a native English speaker", it may cause confusion. This is due to the fact that "different features of nativeness may be salient in any given situation and the concept is not inherently fixed, all-or-nothing, but rather admits of gradience." (Escudero and Sharwood Smith 2001, p. 285)

Furthermore, the idea of native English speakers needing to be from dominant English-speaking countries, such as USA, UK, Australia etc., is already outdated and should be rethought, or as Brutt-Griffler and Samimy note: “National identity should not be a basis of classification of speakers of an *international* language. The more English becomes an international language, the more the divisions of its speakers into ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ becomes inconsistent.” (2001, p. 105, emphasis original)

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There may be much confusion, contradiction and debate surrounding the native English speaker, but this does nothing if not provide fertile ground for research. As was previously mentioned in the introduction, this study will try to incorporate both the views from the “inside” and the “outside”, and investigate the forces at work in constructing the multifaceted native English speaker identity in the modern world.

Taking Faez’s (2011) study as a point of reference, this study’s first question will address various speakers of English and their different linguistic identities, while the second question will investigate which factors of their spoken English are decisive for outside observers’ classification of the speakers as NES or NNES. This will reveal whether accent does indeed play a more significant role in the identification than do other factors of speech. Finally, the two datasets will be compared and contrasted in order to provide a more complete picture of the native English speaker concept. Therefore, the questions I aim to answer are the following:

- (1) What are the most important social components in an individual's self-ascription of a native English speaker identity, or the rejection of it?
- (2) Which factors of an individual’s spoken English are most significant for others to classify them as a native or non-native English speaker?
- (3) If the self-ascription and non-elective ascription prove to be different, what are the reasons underlying this conflict?

4 METHODS AND DATA

Previous methods utilised to study the native speaker concept have, according to Soheili-Mehr (2008), been “self-reflection, interviews, narratives, surveys, fictional accounts, and dialog journals”. (p. 454) However, in most cases, a particular study would make use of only one, rather than a combination of multiple research methods, as Soheili-Mehr suggests should be the practice in future studies.

Taking this suggestion into account, and considering that this study collected two distinct datasets for two different purposes of analysis, several different methods have been utilised in approaching the data.

The self-ascribed native and non-native English speakers' linguistic identities were explored through interviews, after which the researcher obtained audio samples of the interviewees speaking about a neutral topic. The audio samples were subsequently played to Finnish university students, who were asked to fill out a survey asking them whether the people on the recordings were native or non-native English speakers, and which factors in the speech influenced their decision.

4.1 PHASE 1 – NES AND NNES INTERVIEWS

The interviews conducted for the purpose of this study consisted of two parts. The first part was designed as a means of obtaining verbal guises, which would later be played to survey respondents, whilst the second part was a formal interview intended to collect data on the interviewees' linguistic identity construct.

4.1.1 Selection process and criteria

The participants were recruited mostly from the researcher's circle of friends and acquaintances, as well as through university mailing lists and

social media pages. The interviewees obtained from the latter two sources were invited to participate in the study based on being “non-conventional native English speakers”, in whichever way they chose to define themselves as such. Furthermore, all interviewees were chosen so as to be around the same age as the interviewer, and the upper age limit was around 35 years.

Prior to the interviews, five groups of English speakers were loosely defined according to origin and language background, and the goal was to interview at least two people from each group. These were as follows:

1. Prototypical native speakers (born in a majority English-speaking country to English-speaking parents, and have lived there most of their life)
2. Bilingual/multilingual speakers of English and other language(s)
3. English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers, from e.g. Singapore, West and East Africa, India or Pakistan, who define themselves as native English speakers
4. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers who have achieved an accent corresponding to a major English-speaking country, e.g. UK or USA
5. EFL speakers who have **not** achieved an accent corresponding to a major English-speaking country (But nevertheless have a high proficiency)

Before the start of the interview, the participants were asked to provide their name and surname, contact information, age, nationality and field of studies or profession. They were also asked to sign an informed consent form, which guarantees their anonymity and the non-disclosure of information to any third parties, as well as includes the option to at any point retreat from the interview, or to deny having their data used for analysis.

In the end, a total of 13 people were interviewed for the study, 10 of whom were selected for further analysis and use of audio samples. An even distribution among the previously mentioned five groups was achieved, with two prototypical NESs, two EFL speakers, two ESL speakers, three bilinguals, and one EFL speaker from an ESL background. They will be individually introduced in section 5.

4.1.2 Spontaneous interview

The goal of the first part of the interview was to obtain verbal guises and elicit as natural a speech as possible from the participants – the way they would use English in an everyday situation, when e.g. talking to a friend. With this in mind, the interviewees were asked questions such as, "Did you have any adventures as a child?", or "What did you do for fun when you were a kid?", and were then encouraged to develop a narrative in whichever direction they wished. (Wolfson 1976)

According to Wolfson (1976), this type of interview can be problematic if the participants were expecting a more formal question-answer type interview, and therefore the different format could make the participants feel uncomfortable or doubtful. However, the chances of a successful spontaneous interview are greatly increased by choosing to interview people who share some personal attributes with the researcher (e.g. sex, age, class, dialect). In that case, there is a greater sense of solidarity and a reduced sense of power disparity between the interviewee and the researcher. The previously described selection criteria – the age group, and choosing to find participants mostly through groups of friends or acquaintances – were designed especially with these issues in mind.

4.1.3 Formal interview

The elicitation of natural speech was followed by a formal interview, with specific previously prepared questions that were designed to explore the interviewees' social and linguistic background, as well as their construction of a native or non-native English speaker identity. The interview consisted of 10 questions in total, some of which contained sub-questions in cases where further clarification was needed:

1. In which country did you grow up?
2. Have you lived there most of your life?
3. (If the country is not a majority English-speaking country) Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country? (How long?)
4. Where have you learnt English? From parents, friends, community, school?
5. What was the most influential thing in your acquisition of English? (School, TV shows, other English speakers, travelling, games, books)
6. Do your parents speak English? What was the language at home?
7. (If English not mother tongue): When did you start learning English?
8. (If English not mother tongue): In which situations and with whom do you use English?
9. Would you consider yourself a native speaker of English? Why Y/N?
10. What is important to you in order to call someone else a native speaker of English? What boxes does he/she have to "tick"?

Questions 1-3 were designed in order to collect information about the participant's geographical background, while questions 4-8 were concerned with social factors contributing to English language acquisition. The main motivation behind these was to provide a frame for the most important final two questions. The main aim of the formal interview was to look at which

components participants hold to be most important in either identifying as a NES, or explaining why they do not identify as one.

4.1.4 Audio samples

Both the first and the second part of the interview were recorded in their entirety for each interviewee individually. The audio samples were extracted from the first part of the interview using the audio editing software Audacity. The aim was to obtain a 30-second extract of speech which would not contain any cultural references or clues as to the person's sociolinguistic background (with the exception of variety-specific vocabulary), and which would best portray the person's natural speech pace and expressiveness.

4.2 PHASE 2: SURVEY

The survey was constructed after collecting ideas from relevant literature (Garrett 2010, Holmes 2014) and was designed with the intention of examining how laypeople (i.e. in this case those not educated in linguistics) classify someone as a native or non-native English speaker solely on the basis of their speech. The results would then be statistically analysed, studied in detail, and interpreted in light of today's conceptualisations of the native English speaker.

4.2.1 Survey design

The survey's initial page introduced the research and asked respondents to report their age, gender, study subject(s), country of origin and mother tongue. In addition, they were asked to self-assess their English skills by rating their listening, reading, writing and speaking skills on a scale from 1 to 5 (poor – native/native-like). The following page contained instructions on how to fill out the survey, which started on page three.

The survey consisted of 10 pages with questions, one page per audio sample, each of them containing identical questions. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.) The questions were designed so as to examine three components in relation to NES classification and will now be discussed in more detail.

Individual speech factors

The first five questions were aimed at specific factors present in a person's speech which may be telling of their "nativeness". After studying various survey research methods in Holmes (2014), the final decision became to construct the questions for each factor as combinations of a 6-point Likert scale and a semantic differential question. A 6-point scale was used in order to deter indecisive respondents from choosing a middle answer, and the number range chosen was from 0-5, so as to evoke associations to a grading system. The speech factors assessed in the survey were the following:

Accent

Semantic differential: *non-native (0) – native (5)*

The accent rating is, when placed alongside and considered with the perceived country of origin and NES classification, meant to be a representation of the sociopolitical aspect of the native English speaker. In this sense, it is important to look for the correlation between accent rating and the perceived country of origin, as well as their combined relationship to the NES classification.

Vocabulary

Semantic differential: *poor (0) – rich (5)*

This factor serves to investigate how important it is for NES classification that a speaker has a rich vocabulary, or that they use specific words or phrases in their speech. Acquired vocabulary is culturally dependent, but it can also be learned, so it is important to see whether respondents will deem it important for NES status.

Grammar

Semantic differential: *bad* (0) – *perfect* (5)

Grammar is something difficult to judge merely by listening to a 30-second audio sample, but since the issue of the native speaker and grammaticality of language has been continuously raised, it would be beneficial to place it in this study as well. If the survey respondents consider native English speakers to possess superior grammar skills, the results should demonstrate a visible trend of speakers categorised as NNES having low grammar ratings, and vice versa.

Confidence

Semantic differential: *very hesitant* (0) – *very confident* (5)

The confidence factor is meant to subsume, alongside confidence itself, the speaker's fluency and their rate of speech. If respondents will be looking at the native English speaker as someone who has grown up using the language and has thus internalised it, fast and fluent speech should prove to be an important factor in categorizing someone as a NES.

Intelligibility

Semantic differential (to the question "How easy is it to understand what this person is saying?"): *difficult* (0) – *easy* (5)

Even though certain dialects and varieties of English, such as e.g. Glaswegian or Cajun English, are very dissimilar to each other in their linguistic aspects, and speakers of these varieties might arguably even have difficulties understanding each other, their speakers are nevertheless still considered native English speakers rather than native speakers of two different languages. This is, as Davies (2003) argues, because the two varieties have a common history and thus are still considered a part of the same language, much like e.g. German spoken in Germany versus Austrian or Swiss German. (p.53) Furthermore, Widdowson (1994) points out that the existence of standards in major English-speaking countries supposedly guarantees those speakers' intelligibility, and in that regard it is worth investigating whether higher rated intelligibility will be connected to NES classification.

Perceived country of origin

The six-point rating scales are followed by an open-ended question asking respondents to guess from where geographically the speaker comes. Additionally, there is a side note saying that they may be as broad or as specific as they like with their answer.

As was mentioned in the previous section, the perceived area of origin will be analysed alongside accent ratings, as well as on its own, in connection to NES classification, thus evaluating the weight of the socio-political NES construct.

NES/NNES classification

The NES/NNES classification was the penultimate question of the survey, and it was posed as an incomplete sentence with two options:

Would you say that this person is a... (*Please choose one*):

☐ Native English speaker

☐ Non-native English speaker

This option was used rather than a Yes or No question to “Is this person a native English speaker?”, in order to avoid leading those people who have a tendency for positive or negative replies onto one of the answers.

Additional comments

The final question was open-ended, asking for clarification on specific factors which may have had more influence on the respondent’s decision of classifying someone as a NES or NNES. Since the rating scales all carry the same weight, this question is very important as it provides a clearer picture of the NES classification, especially when it is analysed in addition to the individual speech factor rating scores.

4.2.2 Respondents

The survey was aimed at undergraduate university students in Finland from departments other than language or linguistics-oriented ones. An e-mail inquiring about lecturers’ availability to accommodate the survey during one of their lectures was sent to most departments at the university, and the search yielded two invitations to lectures – one from the Department of Mathematics and the other from Forest Sciences.

The total number of respondents was 87, the majority of which (74) belonged to a large course held at the Department of Mathematics. Two of the surveys were invalid due to too many incomplete or omitted answers, which resulted in a final number of 85 surveys that were valid for analysis.

The respondents covered an age range between 18 and 47, with the average respondent age being 23. With regard to gender, 57.6 percent of the

respondents were male, 41.2 percent were female, while one respondent did not specify a gender. At 96.5 percent, nearly all of the respondents were Finnish citizens, while the remaining three were from EFL countries as well – France and China. Furthermore, only one respondent had lived in an English-speaking country for a longer period of time, and none of the respondents specified English as their mother tongue. Therefore, none of the respondents classified as native English speakers.

As mentioned before, the respondents needed to self-assess their English skills. The average scores for skill categories for the entire pool of respondents were 3.66 for listening, 3.89 for reading, 3.42 for writing and 3.11 for speaking, with a total average of 3.52. Since the rating scale was from 2 to 5, this would place the respondents' English skills slightly above average and therefore illustrate the fact that they possess adequate English skills to successfully participate in the survey. It is important to note, however, that the English skills assessment was for the most part merely illustrative, and because the skills were self-assessed, the ratings are prone to personal bias and possibly unreliable.

5.1 INTERVIEWEES' IDENTITY CONSTRUCTS

The interviews were conducted with 13 participants, of whom only 10 will be referred to in this study, as their speech was also used for the audio samples and they are hence eligible for contrast and comparison with survey results. In order to keep the interviewees' identities private, they will be referred under pseudonyms – these are, for the purposes of equality of representation, chosen to be common English names.

The interviewees seemed to be quite interested and eager to speak on the topic of their linguistic identity. as well as to voice their opinions on the concept of the native speaker. In doing so, they provided ample perspectives on the matter, which will now be addressed one person at a time.

5.1.1 Lucy

Lucy belongs to the EFL group – she has grown up in Finland with Swedish as her mother tongue and Finnish as her second language. However, her situation is somewhat peculiar insofar that she has adopted an almost native-like General American accent. In her opinion, this is mostly owing to English cartoon programmes which she started watching already around age 5 or 6, and through which she learned to speak English. This was followed by formal education, reading English novels, and using the internet, which further developed her reading and writing skills.

Therefore, even though Lucy has never lived in an English-speaking country, or even outside of Finland, according to her even American or British people sometimes confuse her for a native English speaker – although always as something “slightly foreign”, e.g. Americans would consider her Canadian.

She claims that the most influential thing in her acquisition of English was probably the fact she was exposed to it at such a young age, and hence never needing to “sit down and learn it”. In fact, Lucy points out that she uses English perhaps even more than Swedish or Finnish on a daily basis, since she uses it in communicating with her roommate and theatre group colleagues. When asked if she would place English on the same level as her mother tongue, she replied: “Yeah, definitely. I mean, I have no problem whatsoever speaking it, I understand it, I write it, I read it; it’s pretty much always been there.”

This partly corresponds to some definitions of a native speaker, those wherein a person has acquired the language from a young age and has internalised it. In this regard, perhaps Lucy could be considered multilingual, with English as the dominant language, even. Nevertheless, when asked whether she would classify herself as a native English speaker, Lucy struggled:

Hummm. Not native in a sense that, you know, I come from another country, and it’s not my mother tongue and so on, but native in the sense that people usually think that I’m [native] ... So, this is not just the case that someone from Sweden or Finland would mistake me. [...] I feel I can express myself very well in English, and it’s not a problem for me to speak or write in English, and actually when I do creative writing, most of my stories are written in English, because I feel like it’s a much more expressive language. ... So, in that sense, yes? Because it comes naturally and because I’ve been able to fool others.

However, when asked whether she would say she was a native English speaker when it was posed as a straightforward question, she said “I

can pass as one, but no.” In order to have the “full title”, Lucy says, English needs to be one’s mother tongue or the first language learned.

Therefore, in this case the interviewee clearly equates *officially* being a native English speaker with having English as a mother tongue. Presumably it should, according to her, be the language of the home, with at least one of the parents as a native English speaker, and it needs to be the first language to which the person is exposed.

5.1.2 Alex

Alex presents another interesting case, one commonly found in today’s world. He was born in Serbia, to Serbian parents, but moved to Australia with his family when he was 6 years old and has lived there ever since. His acquisition of English happened predominantly after the move to Australia, with only 6 months of English lessons in Serbia.

The most influential factor in learning English for Alex was immersion in the local community, as he had no formal English classes in school upon moving to Australia. He states that he still considers Serbian to be his mother tongue, even though his English is far more dominant, both actualised and in his mind. While communicating with his parents he thus uses a great deal of codeswitching, or even completely reverts to English when debating a sensitive issue.

When asked if he would consider himself a native speaker of English, Alex’s response was: “Technically no, but by qualifications yes.” Still, he denies himself a complete identification as a native speaker of Serbian as well:

I don’t consider myself a native speaker of English because I spent the first 6 years of my life speaking another language, but I don’t consider myself a native speaker of Serbian because I didn’t spend the next 12

years of my life speaking it that much as well. So there are holes in both languages in that sense.

When considering the concept of the native speaker, much like Lucy, Alex stresses the importance of early acquisition from parents, adding that the community and cultural background play a significant role as well. His reluctance to classify himself as a native speaker of either English or Serbian, and the claim that “there are holes in both”, is in agreement with some theoreticians’ claims that bilingual speakers, rather than being equally proficient in two languages, are in fact “semilingual”, i.e. they cannot speak either of the languages as well as a “true” native speaker could. (Edelsky et al. 1983; Hinnenkamp 2005).

5.1.3 Peter

Peter is one of the two interviewees in this study who comes from an ESL background. He lived in India up until a couple of years ago, without spending any significant amount of time in any dominant English-speaking country, growing up with Bengali as his mother tongue. Like most people in India, he learnt English predominantly during his formal education, as he attended an English-medium school. However, during those years, Hindi was still the language of communication among his group of friends and represented the most dominant language in his everyday life.

When asked to rank his current language proficiency in the three languages he uses, Peter placed his mother tongue, Bengali, as the lowest; it was followed by Hindi, and English occupied first place. He noted, however, that his dominant language changes depending on where he currently lives and how much time he spends speaking a certain language. Quite interestingly, he noted that he considers himself bilingual in English and Hindi, but he did not include his mother tongue.

Still, Peter does consider himself a native English speaker, his reasoning behind it being that he is fluent in English, and that for him it is the most dominant language at this point. On the other hand, he says that in most cases when he is talking to a “native speaker” (Presumably he means speakers from dominant English-speaking countries), he does not understand what they are saying – in his opinion this happens due to accent differences - and he thus loses confidence in his NES identity.

Peter’s opinion of the native speaker concept differs significantly from those of previous two interviewees, since he denounces the necessity of a person growing up with the language as a determinant factor of NS status. The primary characteristic of a native speaker is, according to him, the ability to produce the language without a great deal of thinking or processing, or as he says: “It comes from within.” Another point he brings up is the use of connection words during a conversation, “so that the other person doesn’t feel bored ... it gives the language a flow or continuity”. Finally, a third remark Peter makes is one related to accent – a native speaker should have an accent which is easy for others to understand.

To sum up, unlike his predecessors, Peter brings up fluency and intelligibility, as well as having English as a dominant, but not necessarily first language, as the main characteristics which define a native English speaker, rather than the age and/or method of acquisition.

5.1.4 Jack

An exemplifying case of bilingualism is found in the fourth interviewee – Jack, a university student with an American father and a Finnish mother. He grew up with both languages, being exposed to English heavily until the age of five while his family was living in the USA, and then becoming immersed in Finnish after moving to Finland where he has

continued to live until today. Not surprisingly, he never disassociated from English, as it was not only the language in which his father spoke to him, but also a language continuously present on TV and the internet, as well as within the circle of his friends.

Much like other bilingual speakers interviewed for this study, who will be addressed later, Jack claims that the dominant language for him changes depending on the circumstances. In everyday life, he finds Finnish more dominant and he needs to put more effort into producing English, but it takes e.g. only a short visit to his grandparents in the US in order to change the dominant language in his mind into English. Furthermore, this is precisely why Jack has no problem identifying himself as a native speaker of both English and Finnish.

While discussing the concept of the native speaker, Jack's opinion on what ultimately constitutes a native speaker of any language is that NS status is primarily an issue of proficiency, which is acquired through using a given language within the language community. Secondly, he brings up the importance of being exposed to the "culture of the language" through e.g. movies, books or games.

Even though proficiency and cultural knowledge are in Jack's opinion crucial, he does dismiss the age of language acquisition as being an important factor in native speaker status. Namely, he states that a person may still become a native speaker of English even if they were to move to an English-speaking country later in life, provided that they at some point become completely comfortable with the language.

Additionally, Jack touches upon one of the dominant topics of this study's survey analysis, the English accent. He admits that it accent issues become confusing, since he would not know how to classify someone who

sounds like they are not from the USA, UK, Australia and similar major English-speaking countries. He would not necessarily consider speakers who sound like they belong outside that circle to be native English speakers, regardless of how good their actual language skills are.

Jack thus follows Peter's reasoning that one may not necessarily have English as a first language or mother tongue to become a its native speaker, but that proficiency in the language is more important. However, unlike Peter, he raises the issue of having the "right" accent – in Jack's case meaning one that corresponds to a dominant English-speaking country. In addition, an idea not previously mentioned, but which he brings up for discussion, is the importance of cultural knowledge acquired in an English-speaking community.

5.1.5 Neil

If Lucy represented an uncharacteristic EFL speaker, Neil could be considered quite typical. He grew up in Italy, speaking Italian as his mother tongue and learning English at school, as well as through computer games, books and the internet. More precisely, he did not start using English more frequently until he moved to Finland some 7 years ago.

Neil describes his acquisition of English as two-fold, due to the fact that he, much like Lucy, developed his reading and writing skills separately from his speaking skills. However, in Neil's case the order was reverse – around the age of 7 he started learning written English by playing console games and reading short stories. His speaking skills at the time were nearly non-existent, until he started English lessons at school. He points out that his speaking skills improved significantly during high school due to the fact that he had a native English speaker as a teacher, and that the biggest shift happened upon moving to Finland, where he needed to use English in

everyday communication. Nowadays he uses English most of the time, unless speaking to his family. He has also developed a habit of writing notes down in English, and points out that he sometimes speaks to himself in English as well.

Nevertheless, he categorically refuses to classify himself as a native English speaker because he “didn’t grow up listening to English and trying to pick it up at the same time”. For him, that is one of the most important things in being a native speaker:

They don’t know any language *at all* and they pick it up from the environment. They do not study the grammar, they don’t even read because they just, you know, hear other people speaking at that time. So they actually learn to speak and to understand much before they learn to write.

Similarly to Jack, Neil adds that it is possible for a person to reach a native-level proficiency later in life as well, and to have the language come naturally to them. Unlike Jack, however, he maintains that these individuals would not be “true” native speakers, since in his mind Neil equates being a native speaker with having a particular language as a first language or mother tongue.

5.1.6 Kevin

Kevin originally comes from Singapore, a country which has in recent decades secured its status as a major ESL country, and in which, just like in India or Africa, there has been much debate on whether speakers of Singaporean English should be considered native English speakers. (Davies 2002)

However, during the time Kevin was growing up – in the late 1970s and early 1980s – the language situation in Singapore was to some degree

different. English did not yet have a strong presence either in schools or in the community, and Malay was instead the lingua franca. Neither of Kevin's parents spoke English, and the language used at home was Teochew Chinese. It was Kevin's older sister who eventually became his English teacher; once she moved out, Kevin started learning English by himself.

Having been educated as an English teacher in a very formal setting, the way Kevin's sister approached English teaching was with a high emphasis on grammar and syntax – for example, Kevin recalls “parsing phrase structure trees at the age of 7”, something “a native speaker of any language never needs to learn”. He notes that since he was so young, this resulted in a merge of natural language acquisition with TEFL-type language learning.

The way Kevin continued acquiring English after his sister was no longer living in the house was by reading various technical magazines, which were, according to him, written in a “much more sophisticated, semi-academic register rather than children's books”. Furthermore, he would later use English in communicating with his Singaporean friends, as well as in daily communication upon moving to Finland.

Even though Kevin does not claim English to be his mother tongue, he readily identifies as a native English speaker, as it is currently his dominant language, and he rarely uses Teochew anymore. The most important point for him in identifying as a native English speaker is the fact that English functions “at a subconscious level” for him – for example, he immediately notices if someone makes a grammatical mistake while speaking English, and intuitively knows that it is wrong before trying to analyse why.

He attributes this internalisation of the language to a combination of factors, mainly the amount of exposure to English at a young age, as well as

reading texts high above his level while he was younger. However, he does admit that his case is very peculiar. Considering the native speaker concept more broadly, he maintains that the main prerequisite for NS classification would be the internalisation of the language and its grammar, such as the one he possesses, as well as proficiency, under which he further subsumes an understanding of register and the ability to codeswitch.

With these prerequisites in mind, Kevin claims he would not necessarily even classify some speakers who have English as their mother tongue as native English speakers, unless they are able to speak Standard English. The main example he uses is someone speaking Glaswegian – they are, according to Kevin, a native speaker of their dialect, but not of English (In this regard, he is presumably referring to Standard English).

After analysing Kevin's interview, one important question surfaces – not necessarily who is a native speaker of English, but of which English is one a native speaker? It seems that Kevin considers himself a native speaker of Standard English – an unusual attitude considering that Standard English is an artificially created variety – and this is something to consider when we look at very advanced EFL learners who are often categorised as “native-like”. Perhaps they are native speakers of Standard English rather than of a particular regional English variety.

5.1.7 Kyle

One of the most interesting interviewees in the group was Kyle, who was born in Finland to Finnish parents, but spent the first 9 years of his life in England – this constitutes one third of his life as he is presently 27. Much like Alex, he did not attend any formal English lessons, even though it was arguably easier for Kyle to acquire the language considering he was only 4 months old at the time of the relocation.

Even though Finnish was still the only language of communication at home, the rest of the world around Kyle was speaking English. England was his home country, and he therefore learned the language, as he says, through immersion. He therefore considers both English and Finnish to be his mother tongues.

Upon moving back to Finland, Kyle continued going to an English-medium international school, and quite strikingly, his accent changed from a southwest London one into what he calls a “a light but pronounced General American twang”. He is still able to revert to the London accent if needed, but he maintains it is usually done merely as a “party favour”.

In recent years, Kyle’s active use of English has diminished as he uses mostly Finnish in everyday life. Regardless of this, his exposure to English has not been significantly reduced, as he frequently uses the internet, watches TV, plays games, etc. He also notes that when he talks to himself, he uses English exclusively as well.

Personally, Kyle considers the most significant factor in being a native speaker to be competence, as well as the way one feels about the language – “not letting anybody else tell you you’re not a native speaker”. Another thing he mentions as important is “growing with the language and letting it be a part of yourself”, as well as being able to mould it and use it creatively.

He adds that it is impossible to speak a language “wrongly” and views people as merely speaking different varieties of English – a view which is on the contrastively opposing side from e.g. Kevin’s. Furthermore, Kyle was notably the first and only interviewee to bring up creative language use as a trademark of a native speaker, which is strongly highlighted by Davies (2003) alongside self-ascription, which was also referred to by Kyle.

5.1.8 Dave

Dave is not someone a layperson might, upon first hearing his speech, call a native English speaker. He comes from Trinidad and Tobago, which is one of the few countries in the Caribbean that are entirely first language English-speaking, and thus stands alongside such dominant forces as the UK and USA.

The reason why Dave might be mistaken for a non-native English speaker, even though his, as well as his parents' mother tongue is English, lies predominantly in the fact that most Caribbean English varieties have a distinct accent. Even though standard English varieties in the respective countries are exonormative, i.e. based on either British or American English, their accents sound unlike any of the ones found in other dominant English-speaking countries.

Apart from spending 20 years of his life in Trinidad, Dave also lived in Australia and England for several years, which he claims has made his Trinidadian accent somewhat less pronounced, especially when talking to a non-Trinidadian person.

When inquired about his perspective on what a native speaker is, Dave said that for him it means that "you have learnt the language without consciously learning it". Hence, according to Dave, if a person "consciously learns" a language, even though they ultimately acquire very high proficiency, they will never be a native speaker of the language.

He proceeds to say that it is nevertheless possible to consciously learn and speak another language better than one's own native language – but that being a native speaker ultimately is not a matter of proficiency:

The “native” part of it is that this language plays a role in the character of the person ... early development is significant, in a way, and your native language is part of that early development.

While discussing the topic of language discrimination, particularly with regard to the fact that some people might not think a Trinidadian to be a native English speaker purely because of their accent, he commented:

I understand why it happens [...] These bigger English countries, especially the US and Britain, they are quite dominant in a way, internationally, so a lot of English culture that people are exposed to is from the US, from Britain. ... There is an impression that English sounds a certain way. I think a lot of it is that. [...]

If you go to Trinidad, and you were to suggest ... to Trinidadian people that they are not native speakers, I think they will take offense to it. ... Most people will, anyway. ... Because most of them are, you know ... 99 percent probably don't speak another language. Of course, they have their own dialect, their own accent, but it's no more grammatically incorrect than, say, American English or British English.

Therefore, Dave's views can be summarised as him equating native speaker status of a certain language with having grown up immersed in it, regardless of proficiency or variety.

5.1.9 John

Out of all the interviewed speakers, John would probably qualify as the most prototypical native English speaker. He is American, born in Georgia to English-speaking parents, and moved to Finland seven years ago at the age of 18. Even though he has learnt some Finnish, he still overwhelmingly uses English in everyday communication.

It is therefore not surprising that John readily identifies as a native English speaker; however, that does not mean that he has not questioned the concept at some point. He starts by making a distinction between native speakers and fluent speakers, since for him a native speaker is purely “somebody who grew up with the language they don’t necessarily even have to speak it well, it’s just something they spoke natively growing up.”

In a different category, he places people who may speak a language very fluently without having learnt it from their parents or while growing up. Furthermore, on the topic of native English speakers who have an accent other than American, British or that of another dominant English-speaking country, John refers to cognitive science:

There isn’t a... English. English is just kind of a fake concept in that it’s the rules that govern some collection of languages, and it’s kind of the etiquette and the rules which allow us to write things that we can each understand them and whatnot. But nobody speaks *English*, everyone speaks their own variant of English [...] So, if they speak with an accent that is very difficult for someone else who speaks English to understand, they both speak English but they speak different dialects or something along those lines. It’s very easy for them both to be native speakers but not understand each other.

In this way, another interviewee raises one of the arguments presented by Davies (2003), which is that everyone is a native speaker of their own idiolect. (pp. 26-27) John is nevertheless stricter with his definition insofar that he claims a native speaker must be someone who has grown up with the language – EFL speakers who can perhaps “pass as native” he classifies as just extremely fluent, which does not necessarily, as he previously mentioned, undermine their language competence.

5.1.10 Mark

The last interviewee to provide an audio sample for the survey comes from a similar background as Peter. Mark is Nigerian, and has thus grown up in an ESL environment. He had a complete English-medium education, starting from elementary school and continuing until today, as he is still studying in English at university level.

As Mark recounts, he grew up with three languages – his mother tongue Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin, and Standard English. Like in many other ESL countries, the language situation was not free from ambiguity. At home, the family codeswitched between all three languages, the community spoke mostly Nigerian Pidgin, whilst Standard English was used in more formal settings.

Due to the fact that English was at least partially used in communication within the family, Mark had been exposed to it even before starting school. He nevertheless points out English-medium education to have been the most influential factor in his acquisition of English, and sometime after he turned nine, English in fact became so dominant for him that he lost competence in his mother tongue.

On a more general level, Mark believes that a native speaker identity is something “much more personal”, and when asked why he considers himself a native English speaker, Mark did not hesitate in his reply:

Because I grew up speaking English, and because it's the official language of my country [...] I think in English, I probably dream in English ... I express myself better in English, like, way better. If I'm gonna be speaking with another Nigerian right now I will start with Yoruba, I will always switch to English eventually, it happens all the time.

Taking all of Mark's points into consideration, it would seem that his perspective on the native speaker concept is similar to those expressed by many other interviewees – in order to be a native speaker of a language, you need to have grown up with that language, and it needs to be the “language of your brain”.

5.1.11 Summary and interpretation

Even with only ten interviews included in this study, it is not difficult to understand why the concept of the native speaker – more specifically, of the native speaker of English – has become such a contentious topic. With no precise definition, and no consensus on the matter, it is ultimately an issue of identity and a personal choice for the interviewees. Depending on the person in question, being a native English speaker does not necessarily subsume either language proficiency on the one hand, or having English as a mother tongue on the other.

An interesting observation is that just three of the interviewees selected proficiency or fluency as an important factor in being a native speaker. On the other hand, seven interviewees in total believe that acquiring the language by immersion at a very young age is, in general, the main element in native speaker status. Out of these seven, three interviewees stressed the importance of having the relevant language as a mother tongue or first language, while four interviewees advocated merely growing up with the language, without it necessarily being the language of the home.

Additionally, there was a variety of contributing factors which some of the interviewees noted to also be important for NS status - four people expressed that for someone to be a native speaker, they need not have necessarily grown up with the language, as long as the language is dominant

for them on an everyday basis. A more complete picture of all the factors that interviewees chose as important for NS status can be observed in Table 1.

Several interviewees brought up the issue of language discrimination connected to English speakers not coming from dominant English-speaking countries – they were adamant about the fact that it does not matter where a person is from or what accent they have. Native English speaker status, in their opinion, ought to instead solely depend on whether the person has grown up speaking English and internalised the language.

Justification for NS status	Lucy	Alex	Peter	Jack	Neil	Kevin	Kyle	Dave	John	Mark
Mother tongue/first language	X	X			X					
Growing up with the language*							X	X	X	X
Language internalization and dominance**			X	X		X				X
Additional contributing factors pointed out										
Cultural knowledge from language community		X		X						
Proficiency and internalized grammar				X		X	X			
Importance of self-ascription							X			X
Everyone is a NS of their own variety							X		X	
Creative use of language							X			

*without it necessarily being acquired from parents, but still at a very young age

**without it necessarily being acquired at a very young age

Table 1. Determining components in making a native speaker according to interviewees

One pattern apparent from the results is that it was mostly those speakers who cannot identify themselves as native English speakers “by birthright” who ultimately chose language internalisation and dominance as the main justification for classifying themselves as NESs – otherwise, they would not be able to ascribe themselves such a status. Furthermore, even though only two interviewees stated that adopting a NES identity is a personal choice and only two additionally spoke up against variety-related discrimination, it is important to note that their opinions on these matters were not asked through direct questions, and therefore cannot be taken as representative in their quantity.

The most important observations from the results would therefore be the following: (1) only three of the ten interviewees explicitly equated being a native English speaker with having it as a mother tongue, i.e. first language; (2) the most important thing for them was rather growing up with the language and acquiring it “unconsciously”, outside of formal education and (3) the native speaker’s possession of superior proficiency and internalised grammar, often used as an argument in applied linguistics, was mentioned by only three interviewees.

However, in most encounters with an English speaker, we are unfamiliar with their origin, background or linguistic identity, and the only element observers can rely on in order to judge their NES/NNES status is their speech, and perhaps appearance. The second part of the study will address this problematic issue by analysing survey responses to audio samples of spoken English produced by the 10 interviewees. (In the following sections, the interviewees will be referred to as “speakers”.)

5.2 SURVEY RESULTS

The large variety of questions present in the survey ultimately yielded a plethora of data for analysis, the main foci of which will be (1) the significance of individual speech factors in correlation with NES classification; (2) the correlation between perceived country of origin and NES classification; (3) exploring connections between points 1 and 2.

The first step in analysis was entering the survey data into, and coding it in, IBM SPSS Statistics v.22, and subsequently exporting it to Microsoft Office Excel 2013. SPSS was ultimately used for analysing the significance of individual speech factors and perceived country/area of origin in predicting NES classification, whereas Excel served for constructing further comparisons and illustrative charts.

5.2.1 NES-NNES classification results and average scores

Presented first will be the results regarding the classification of individual speakers as native or non-native English speaking, as well as their average scores for specific speech factors. As can be viewed in Chart 1, John was overwhelmingly in first place in being classified as a native English speaker, followed by Jack and Kyle, whereas Dave, Mark and finally Peter occupy the last three places, respectively.

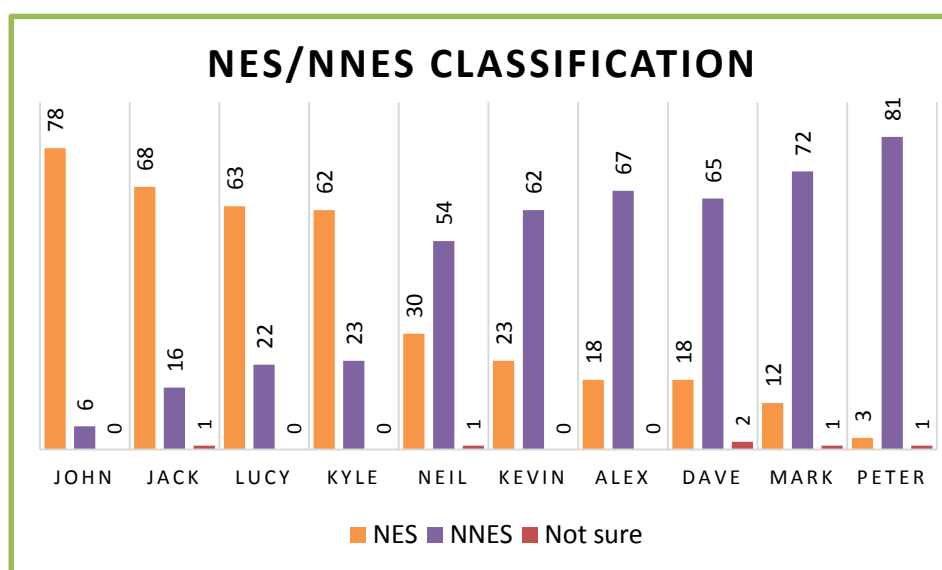


Chart 1. Classification of speakers as native or non-native English speakers

Their respective average scores for individual speech factors follow this trend to a certain degree, even though it is visible from Table 2 that the total average score for speakers does not entirely correlate to the NES classification. Even though John was classified as a NES by 91.8% of respondents, he was only second in the combined average speech factors score, while Jack was the one in the first place – even though he was classified as a NES by only 80% of respondents.

	Accent	Vocabulary	Grammar	Confidence	Intelligibility	TOTAL	NES % results
John	4.54	4.18	4.05	3.30	4.30	4.07	91.8%
Jack	4.34	3.80	3.93	4.32	4.42	4.16	80.0%
Lucy	4.09	3.04	3.64	4.35	4.38	3.90	74.1%
Kyle	4.09	3.74	3.71	4.11	3.94	3.92	72.9%
Neil	2.82	2.85	3.06	2.99	3.09	2.96	35.3%
Kevin	2.69	2.61	2.98	2.73	3.25	2.85	27.1%
Dave	2.72	3.07	3.31	3.31	3.88	3.26	21.2%
Alex	2.73	2.71	3.25	2.98	4.02	3.14	21.2%
Mark	1.91	2.89	2.87	3.11	2.20	2.60	14.1%
Peter	0.98	2.12	2.45	2.15	2.56	2.05	3.5%

Table 2. Average scores and NES classification percentages

When we take into consideration the speakers' backgrounds, described in section 5.1, there is an obvious discrepancy between how the speakers identify themselves and how the respondents classified them. Notable cases would be Lucy's third place in being classified as a NES while she does not consider herself one, and Dave's third lowest NES classification place, even though English is his mother tongue and he has grown up speaking nothing else. The possible explanations for these discrepancies will be explored in the next section.

5.2.2 Significance of speech factors for NES classification

From Table 2, it is visible that some speech categories more closely follow the NES classification than do others. Accent is the only factor that follows the classification entirely, while other factors are either moderately or completely irregular in relation to it. As an illustrative example, the following two charts show a side-by-side comparison of the average accent score and the intelligibility score, respectively, with the NES classification percentage.

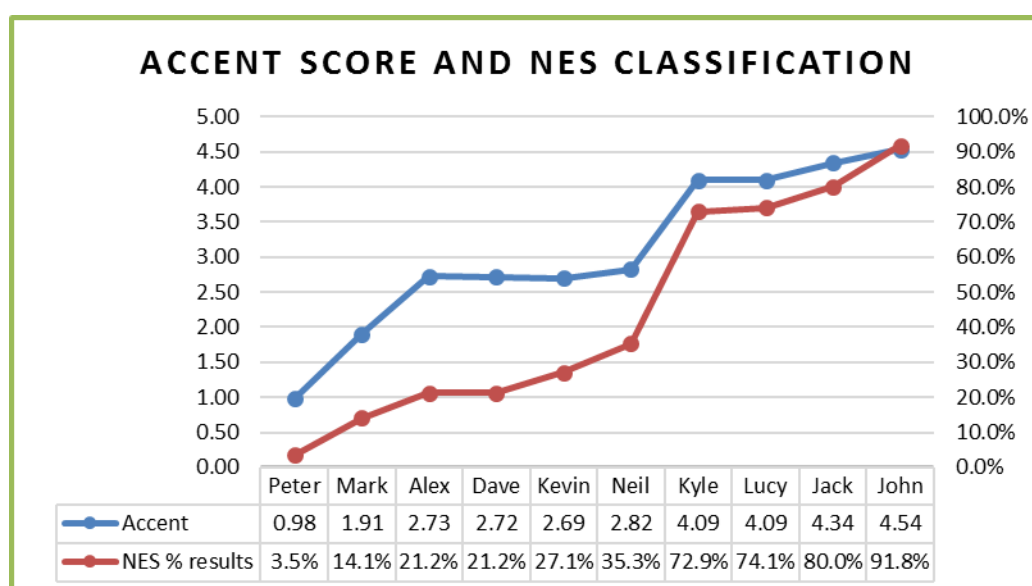


Chart 2. Average accent score and NES classification comparison

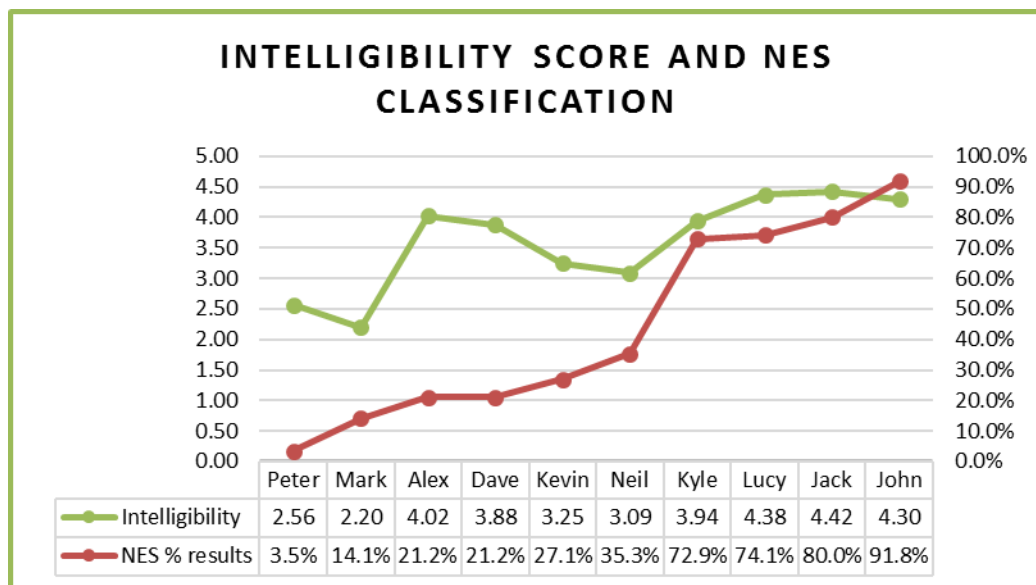


Chart 3. Average intelligibility score and NES classification comparison

In order to analyse this phenomenon more thoroughly, the data was fit into a binary logistic regression model using SPSS. Binary logistic regression was chosen as a statistical analysis method as it “aid[s] in understanding and testing complex relationship among variables and in forming predicting equations”; it enables “categorically and continuously scaled variables”, in this case, the speech factors, “to predicat any categorically scaled variable” – the NES/NNES status. (King 2008, p. 258)

The primary aim of conducting a statistical analysis was to discover the significance of individual speech factors in predicting the NES-NNES classification. The way in which a model is constructed is to “[derive] an estimation equation composed of predictors (Xvariables) that maximally explain the variation of scores on the criterion (Yvariable).” (King 2008, p. 359) In this case, the NES-NNES classification was chosen as the critorion – in SPSS called dependent variable, while the five factors were chosen as predictions, called co-variates in SPSS.

The final model reported a 94.3 percent success of prediction, thereby establishing the reliability of the results. Table 3 shows that accent and confidence were calculated to be the most significant factors in predicting NES classification, with vocabulary being slightly less significant, but still within the .05 margin that is in statistics considered significant. (Inferential statistics, n.d.) At the same time, grammar seemed to be least significant.

Variables in the Equation			
		B (coefficient)	Significance
Step 1 ^a	Accent	3.057	.000
	Vocabulary	.710	.014
	Grammar	.292	.428
	Confidence	.923	.001
	Intelligibility	.343	.201

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Acc, Vocab, Gram, Conf, Intel, Respondent_ID, Speaker_ID.

Table 3. Binary logistic regression model for predicting NES classification with speech factors as co-variables

The answers collected from the final question in the survey also attested these results. To reiterate, this was an open-ended question which asked respondents to point out the factors which were most significant for them in classifying a particular speaker as NES or NNEs. Naturally, this was not a scientifically rigorous method of testing significance, but functioned well as contributing data to the statistical analysis.

Respondents' answers to this question varied in quantity and quality, but were found to contain similar elements and were therefore classified into eight categories: (1) Accent/Pronunciation of specific words or phonemes, (2) Confidence/Fluency, (3) Vocabulary/Use of specific words or phrases, (4) Rate of speech, (4) Intonation/Rhythm, (5) Grammar, (7) Intelligibility and (8) Other.

These categories were further divided according to whether the speaker was classified as a native or non-native English speaker, and then put alongside each other for comparison, for each speaker respectively. The

resulting table shows, similarly to the statistical analysis conducted in SPSS, that accent and confidence were the leading two factors, followed by vocabulary.

NES Classification	N	NNES Classification	N
Accent/Pronunciation of specific words or phonemes	44	Accent/Pronunciation of specific words or phonemes	59
Confidence/Fluency	31	Confidence/Fluency	36
Vocabulary/Use of specific words or phrases	26	Vocabulary/Use of specific words or phrases	22
Other	13	Other	12
Rate of speech	7	Intelligibility	5
Intonation/Rhythm	5	Rate of speech	4
Grammar	4	Intonation/Rhythm	2
Intelligibility	3	Grammar	1

Table 4. Respondents' categories of significant factors for classification

The question stemming from the results at hand, however, is what kind of an accent the respondents were rating high and consequently classifying as native English. For this purpose, the survey posed a question asking the respondents to guess which country or area the speaker was from. The collected results were then also observed in relation to NES-NNES classification and later included in the binary logistic regression model as well.

5.2.3 Correlation between perceived country of origin and NES classification

Prior to entering the domain of analyses and comparisons, the first step was to observe the data obtained from the open-ended question on the speakers' origin. Once more, it was necessary to code the answers into categories which would group specific countries and territories. This was necessary since some respondents were as specific as writing a city (e.g.

“New York”), whereas others may just have written “English-speaking country”, “Europe” or “black”.

The answers were first grouped into categories such as “Western/Middle Europe”, “Australia/New Zealand”, “North America/USA/Canada”, “India/Pakistan/Bangladesh”, etc., in order to maintain a degree of specificity. The categorisation of each speaker according to these categories can be found in Appendix C. However, it soon became apparent that, for the purposes of this study, the groups would need to be further combined into what would become five distinct categories:

L1: Dominant first-language English speaking countries/areas

L2: ESL countries/areas, including answers containing just the word “Africa”

EFL: Countries/areas where English is learnt as a foreign language, including the answer “Asia” considering it most probably refers to East Asia excluding Singapore

L1+L2/EFL: Respondent has written two categories, e.g. “US and Finland”, “Britain or India”

N/A: Question left blank or answer is inconclusive

Once the five categories were defined and analysed for each respective speaker, their final distribution was calculated and is now presented in the following chart:

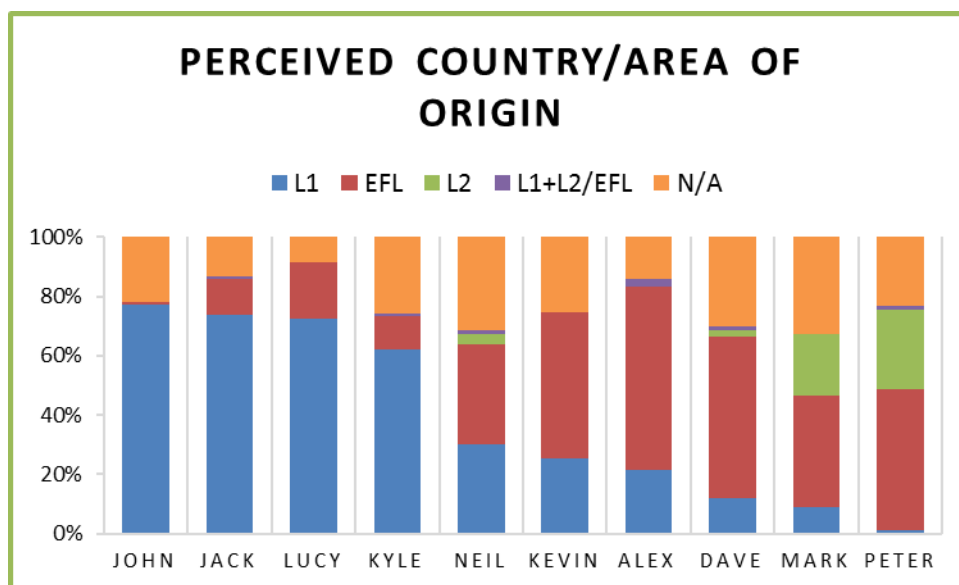


Chart 4. Perceived country/area of origin of individual speakers

One pattern already visible in Chart 4, and which will be further illustrated in Chart 5, is that those speakers who were predominantly classified as native English speakers are also those who had the highest percentage of perceived L1 origin. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the two speakers who had the highest perceived L2 origin were also the two lowest rated in terms of being native English speakers, even though English has a much stronger presence in ESL countries than it does in EFL ones.

With these numbers in mind, a comparative line chart of perceived L1 origin and NES classification was created in order to visually explore the relationship between the two, and to get an indication of whether perceived origin was significant. The resulting chart showed perceived L1 origin to be even more connected to NES classification than accent:

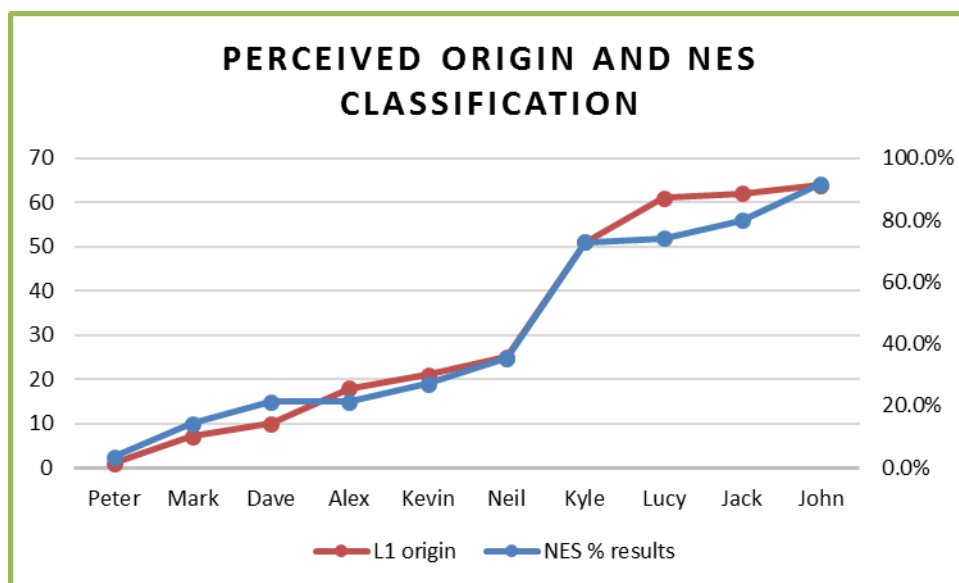


Chart 5. Comparison between speakers' perceived L1 origin and classification as native English speaker

In order to deepen the analysis further, the perceived country/area of origin was added alongside speech factors as an additional categorical co-variate into the previously conducted binary logistic regression model in SPSS. The newly constructed model showed perceived origin to be equally significant as the speaker's accent, although as a result of adding a new co-variate into the model, the significance of other speech factors decreased slightly. However, the reliability of the prediction rose from 94.3 percent when only speech factors were analysed to 97.8 percent with the addition of the perceived origin.

Variables in the Equation

		B (coefficient)	Significance
Step 1 ^a	Accent	2.810	.000
	Vocabulary	1.453	.078
	Grammar	-1.178	.174
	Confidence	1.185	.085
	Intelligibility	.005	.994
	Origin		.000

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Acc, Vocab, Gram, Conf, Intel, Origin, Respondent_ID, Speaker_ID.

Table 5. Binary logistic regression model for predicting NES classification with speech factors and perceived country/area of origin as co-variables

Even though the question on perceived origin was open-ended rather than multiple-choice, and was left blank by 22.8 percent of respondents, its correlation to NES classification is nevertheless difficult to ignore – especially when we observe how much the significance of other speech factors fell with the addition of perceived origin to the statistical model. The following section aims to summarise these results, as well as to put them into perspective and in relation to each other.

5.2.4 Summary and interpretation

Both simple charts constructed in Excel as well as statistical models performed in SPSS have shown two distinctly significant factors which influenced respondents' classification of speakers as native or non-native English speakers – accent and perceived country of origin. Closely following them were confidence and vocabulary, whereas grammar and intelligibility had little or no influence on the respondents' decisions.

It would seem that the degree to which a person was perceived to be from a dominant L1 English-speaking country contributed greatly to their classification as a native English speaker, whereas being perceived as coming from an ESL background was most detrimental to NES classification.

Considering that accent was statistically as significant as perceived origin, the interpretation which this study draws from the results is the following: **If a speaker has an accent which the respondent associates to a dominant L1 English-speaking country, he/she will be classified as a native English speaker.** Factors which may further contribute to the speaker being classified as a NES are (1) sounding confident or fluent and (2) using specific phrases or words which the respondent considers to be from a dominant L1 English-speaking country.

For the purposes of this study, “dominant” L1 English-speaking countries are all those belonging to Kachru’s Inner Circle, with the exclusion of Caribbean English-speaking countries, on account of their accent being unfamiliar to most laypeople. In fact, it seems that the more “foreign” a speaker’s accent sounds to the respondent, the less chance the speaker has of being classified as a NES. Since this study was conducted in Finland, speakers who sounded more Scandinavian or European were thus rated higher than those perceived to be from India or Africa. This issue will be further addressed in the next section.

It is apparent from the two analysed datasets that the native speaker concept is highly fluid and contextual, depending on whether it is used as a part of one's linguistic identity, or observed from the outside by others. This section aims to put forward some ideas as to why these discrepancies occur, and how they present themselves in the survey data.

6.1 NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER PROTOTYPE VS STEREOTYPE

Before entering any further into discussion, it is important to once more refer to Escudero and Sharwood Smith (2001), who describe two different types of NES categorisation – the first looks at how well a person first a NES prototype, whilst the second looks at NES stereotype fit. They describe the NES stereotype as an overly simplified idea of the speaker, whose characteristics are “having been born and brought up in a relevant language community” and “[possessing] a particular accent.” (p. 280)

Another notable observation brought forward by Escudero and Sharwood Smith is that “clever use of a colloquial expression or abstruse technical term plus a good accent may trigger a perception of nativeness in someone whose performance, to a trained observer, is quite clearly non-native in all other respects.” (p.280)

If we take these ideas into account, it would seem that the survey respondents were relying on a NES stereotype in their classification of speakers, since accent and perceived country of origin were shown to be the most significant predictors of NES classification. Furthermore, in agreement with Escudero and Smith's second observation, the use of “kind of”, “like”, “whatnot”, and similar colloquialisms, was often iterated as one of the reasons for classifying someone as a native English speaker, and this was

additionally confirmed by the statistical model which demonstrated vocabulary's significance quotient to be very high.

On the other hand, a native speaker prototype represents a somewhat different concept: "[The] categorisation involves assumptions as to which features are core, which are peripheral, and which are indeterminate between core and peripheral features." (Escudero and Sharwood Smith 2001, p.282) The prototype definition is therefore dependent on what the individual wielding it chooses as core and peripheral features, rather than the features being imposed from the outside.

In this way it is visible, for example, why two different interviewees with very different backgrounds may have both defined themselves as native English speakers. Rather than focusing on accent or the community in which he grew up, for Kevin the core feature of his NES status was proficiency and fluency; for Peter and Michael, it was the fact that English is their dominant language. In this way, they created their own NES prototype with them at the core, rather than comparing themselves to an imposed stereotype which was ultimately the cause of discrepancies in classification. (See Chart 6.)

On a similar note, we observe that even though Lucy did not consider herself a NES on account of not having grown up in an English-speaking country – something which is a core feature of her NES prototype – a large number of survey respondents nevertheless classified her as a NES. However, this is not surprising, seeing that she was largely observed to be Northern American and thus possessed the main two components of the general NES stereotype that Escudero and Sharwood Smith pointed out – the appearance of being brought up in a relevant language community and possessing a relevant accent.

In order to illustrate these discrepancies, a scale of “nativeness” was created for the purpose of this study. It expresses the degree of compliance to the NES stereotype wherein the core feature would be growing up in an English-speaking community with English as a mother tongue. The speakers were hence scaled as closer or further away from the core:

1. L1 speaker from L1 country (John, Dave)

Exposure from early age at home and in community

2. Bilingual with an L1 parent (Jack)

Exposure from early age at home

3. Bilingual grown up in an L1 country with EFL parents (Kyle)

Exposure from early age in community

4. EFL speaker emigrated to L1 country* (Alex)

Exposure at later age in community

5. ESL speaker from ESL country* (Peter, Mark)

Exposure to ESL English from an early age

6. EFL speaker from ESL country (Kevin)

Formal education followed by exposure in community

7. EFL speaker from EFL country (Lucy, Neil)

Formal education

*claim English as their dominant language

This scale was then contrasted against the actual survey results showing the percentage of each speaker's classification as a native English speaker:

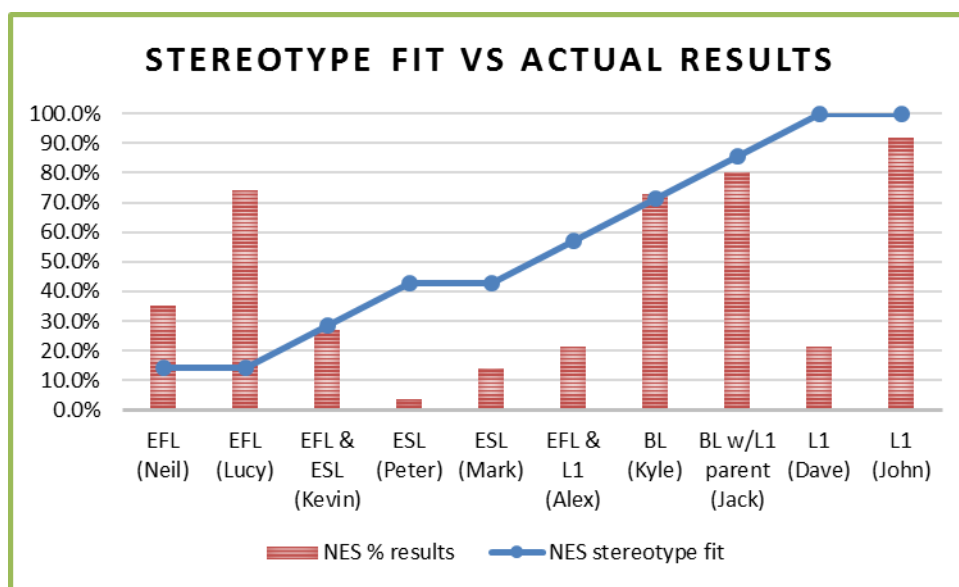


Chart 6. NES prototype fit compared with actual percentages of NES classification

An important observation that must be made is that speakers from ESL countries, Mark and Peter, were second-lowest and lowest in being classified as native English speakers, even though being from a country in which English is an official language ought to have brought them closer to the NES stereotype than speakers from EFL countries. Furthermore, Dave was the speaker who had the biggest discrepancy between how well he fits the NES stereotype and how often he was classified as a NES. These results will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

6.2 SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

Having contrastively compared the two datasets presented in this study, one can see that an attempt at defining a native English speaker is in no way closer to resolution. On one hand, the interviewees constructed their own prototypes of a native English speaker with certain core features which they would either claim to possess or not to possess, after which they would classify themselves accordingly as NES or NNES. For the majority, the core feature was whether they had grown up in an English-speaking community or with an English-speaking parent/parents; however, several interviewees chose proficiency or English being their dominant language as the core feature, because it better suited their needs for linguistic identity.

The survey respondents, on the other hand, needed to take a different approach to their attempts at classifying speakers as NES or NNES, as they could only refer to audio samples and had no background information on the speakers. In this situation, the respondents retreated to their image of the NES stereotype – a person from a dominant L1 English-speaking country, i.e. USA, Canada, UK, Ireland, Australia or New Zealand. English-speaking Caribbean countries are excluded from categorisation as “dominant”, since their accent is unfamiliar to most listeners.

Ultimately, the most decisive factors which **the respondents** used to judge whether the speaker fits the NES stereotype was (1) whether their accent sounded like it was from a relevant (dominant L1 English-speaking) country, (2) whether they sounded confident, and (3) whether they used words or phrases the respondent associated with a relevant country.

Thus, the more foreign and unfamiliar an accent sounded, the less the speaker was classified as a NES. This unfamiliarity is arguably what led to Dave being overwhelmingly classified as a NNES despite speaking English

as his first language, while Lucy was largely classified as a NES even though she is an EFL speaker grown up in Finland. Furthermore, Peter and Mark were the two lowest-rated speakers, even though they had grown up surrounded by English, albeit without speaking it as their mother tongue. What was detrimental for them was the same factor as in Dave's case – an accent that was too foreign-sounding, and farthest away from the stereotype.

Keeping in mind the apparent clashes in the various conceptualisations of the native English speaker which this study has exemplified, it is important to consider the possible implications of such a situation for today's world, as well as to discuss possible re-evaluations and new approaches to the topic.

7.1 REVISITING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Prior to entering into discussion, we should revisit the study's original research questions in order to explore how well they have been addressed and how they relate to previous studies. In general, the study successfully attained answers to all three research questions, with several additions and amendments during the actual research and analysis process.

(1) What are the most important social components in an individual's self-ascription of a native English speaker identity, or the rejection of it?

In light of the material obtained from interviews and their method of analysis, the first question ought to be slightly reformulated, as it resulted in exploring the interviewees' NES/NNES identity interchangeably with their conceptualisations of a native speaker in general. The results ultimately communicated that, for the majority of interviewees, the most important factor in being a native speaker of a certain language is to have grown up with it, either by having it as one's first language or by acquiring it from the community.

A smaller number of interviewees, which should nevertheless not be disregarded, claimed that the most important factor in being a native speaker is for the language to be dominant in one's mind, i.e. to be "the language of their brain", even though it may not have been acquired through early-age immersion. Similar cases were also observed in studies done by Faez (2011) and Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001). It is important to note, however, that the interviewees who were in favour of this type of reasoning were primarily those who claimed NES status despite not having grown up in an English-

speaking community, and it such reasoning was therefore important for them in order to justify their own self-ascribed NES status.

Additionally, cultural knowledge was introduced as important factor on several occasions, but most strikingly, proficiency and internalised knowledge of grammar was chosen as a defining NS factor by only three interviewees. Furthermore, grammar rating was also the least significant factor in predicting NES classification by survey respondents. This invalidates the common belief of native English speakers being better teachers or proof-readers on account of them having superior language skills to non-native speakers.

Having compared these results to Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001), their argument of NES being a non-elective category constructed by society proves to be problematic. This is because despite two interviewees explicitly mentioning the idea of self-ascription, and of NES identity being something personal, the fact that many of them did claim to be a NES while denied that status by survey respondents does strengthen Davies' (2003) argument that self-ascription is, in fact, the most important factor for personal NES identity. Hence, even though others may not have seen them as native English speakers, the only NES concept which ultimately mattered to the interviewees was the one they had constructed for themselves.

(2) Which factors of an individual's spoken English are most significant for others to classify them as a native or non-native English speaker?

The study utilised three approaches to the analysis of speech factor significance for the classification of speakers as NES or NNES. Firstly, there were preliminary comparison charts of average speech factor score correspondence to NES classification,; secondly, a binary logistic regression model of speech factor significance in predicting NES classification, and

finally, observation of categories which most often influenced respondents' NES/NNES classification, explored through an open-ended question.

The results overwhelmingly indicated accent to be the most significant predictor of NES classification, followed by confidence and vocabulary. This was confirmed both by statistical analysis and the observation of answers to the open-ended question. However, there is an additional factor which the initial research question failed to take into account, but that ultimately proved to be extremely important – the perceived origin of the speaker. The results have proved perceived speaker origin to be as important as accent in predicting NES/NNES classification. The two actually appear to be intrinsically connected, insofar that an accent which sounded like it was from a dominant L1 English-speaking country received the highest ratings and was perceived “most native”. The less a speaker's accent complied with the former, i.e. the more “foreign” it sounded, the lower it was rated, and the speaker's ultimate NES classification consequently suffered. These results are in agreement with both Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001) and Escudero and Sharwood Smith (2001), who note relevant accent and origin as the main categories of the NES social identity construct.

In addition, similarly to the results obtained from interviews, grammar skills proved to be least significant in NES status ascription. This proves to be in line with arguments made by Paikeday (1985), Canagarajah (1999) and Phillipson (1992), among others, who criticise such NES status-related discrimination.

(3) If the self-ascription and non-elective ascription prove to be different, what are the reasons underlying this conflict?

The self-ascribed identities and those perceived by the survey respondents did indeed prove to be very different, although this is, in light of what the survey results have shown, not entirely surprising. When we utilise the terminology introduced by Escudero and Sharwood Smith (2001), it could be argued that the main reason underlying the conflict of native English speaker conceptualisations was the clash between the respective NES prototypes built by the interviewees/speakers and the NES stereotype against which the survey respondents gauged the speakers' English. Even though it is visible that NES identity is ultimately something very personal on an individual level, when it functions on a larger societal scale, most people resort to a black-and-white standpoint on the matter. That will say, there is one particular view of what a native English speaker should look or sound like, and people are judged to either fit into the stereotype or are otherwise dismissed and denied NES status. It is still debatable, however, whether NES identity is essentially a matter of negotiation between the personal and societal construct, or whether the societal construct exists at the cost of the individual.

7.2 IMPLICATIONS

With only 10 speakers and 85 survey respondents at its disposal, this study was able to explore only a small number of NES identity constructs. In addition, this was conducted in a highly narrow environment of just two departments at one Finnish university. However, despite its small numbers, the study has succeeded in providing new insights into conceptualisation conflicts and clashes related to the native English speaker concept. With regard to the modern dominance of the English language, such problematics

will arguably become increasingly important and spark even more debate in the coming years.

An attempt to put the survey results into perspective yields a somewhat disheartening image of the world – one in which people’s individual linguistic identities are not recognised by others on account of narrow and sometimes incorrect preconceptions of what a native English speaker should sound like, and where they should come from. The reality proves to be much more complicated, especially for people growing up in ESL countries, or those who immigrate to an English-speaking country at a later age. English may be the only language in which these individuals can fully express themselves, even though to others they may sound foreign or “wrong”. The concept of the native English speaker should therefore be more severely debated and revisited, with emphasis on those who have been left out of the NES stereotype and may as a result suffer discrimination.

There are, however, several interesting questions which this study unfortunately had no time or resources to investigate. Even though the results have shown a clear pattern in speakers who possess a very foreign-sounding accent being classified as NNEs, it would be valuable to explore whether the results would have been different if the survey respondents were given more background information on the speakers.

Similar future studies may thus apply a similar survey model to investigate NES/NNE speaker classification, but include more information on the speakers’ origin and background, e.g. that a speaker has undergone English-medium education, or that he/she spoke English at home, etc. Another suggestion would be to use video instead of audio samples and to observe whether the speaker’s appearance holds any influence in NES/NNE classification.

Furthermore, it would also be recommended to conduct a new study with a different pool of survey respondents, since this study only had the chance to focus on a very narrow group of university students, all of whom were non-native English speakers and for the most part shared the same nationality. Namely, similar could be conducted with self-identifying native English speakers as survey respondents; otherwise, the study could compare the responses of different age groups, or respondents from different countries.

In conclusion, this small-scale study has succeeded in its goal to gain new insights into the complex realm of native English speaker conceptualisations, and its many contradictions and clashes. More specifically, the concept was observed from two standpoints: Firstly, the focus was on persons who accept or deny the NES concept as a part of their linguistic identity via comparing themselves to a personally constructed NES prototype. Secondly, these prototypes were challenged by outside observers who judged speakers' NES or NNES membership based only on their preconceived image of a NES stereotype.

The results demonstrated how NES status was for the interviewees predominantly a personal matter – one may safely assume that even if the speakers with the largest discrepancies between self-identification and survey classification were to observe survey results, this would not change their linguistic identity. It can, however, lead to language-related discrimination, and for that reason, this study calls for an attempt at reinventing the NES concept.

As this study has demonstrated, the existing NES stereotype carries with itself the risk of repudiating linguistic identities of an increasing number of people around the world who, regardless of having English as the

dominant language in their life, exist only on the boundaries of the stereotype and are thus marginalised and discriminated against. A more favourable approach to the concept could therefore be one that is focused on the individual and their identity, rather than society at large. In this way, the discourse would be one of “self-identified” native or non-native English speakers, without the need for labels and stereotypes.

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9.1 APPENDIX A: SURVEY

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

University of Helsinki, April/May 2014

You have been asked to participate in a research project, which is part of a Master's degree thesis being conducted by Ida Mauko, a student of English Philology at the University of Helsinki.

***This questionnaire is anonymous.** No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity.*

***Your participation is voluntary.** You may choose not to take the questionnaire, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Your completion of the questionnaire serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project.*

The questionnaire should take about 30 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION:

Please, write the following information on the lines provided. This is necessary because some demographic information may prove relevant in analysing the results of the questionnaire.

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: _____

3. Study subject(s):

4. In which country/countries did you grow up?

5. Mother tongue: _____ (if bilingual or multilingual write all)

6. Describe your **level of English** by rating your skills in each of the categories.

Circle a number which corresponds to you, from **1 (poor)** to **5 (native or native-like)**

<i>Listening</i>	1	2	3	4	5
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<i>Reading</i>	1	2	3	4	5
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<i>Writing</i>	1	2	3	4	5
----------------	---	---	---	---	---

<i>Speaking</i>	1	2	3	4	5
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Thank you very much for your time and effort! The instructions for the questionnaire can be found on the following page, and we will soon begin.

INSTRUCIONES FOR FILLING OUT THE QUESTIONNAIRE:

- You will hear 10 (ten) different audio samples of people speaking in English about what they did for fun when they were kids, or telling an anecdote from their childhood.

Please listen to their speech carefully.

- After an audio sample has been played, you will be given about a **minute and a half** to answer the questions about it, before we move on to the next sample.

INFO ON QUESTIONES 1-5:

(The same for every audio sample)

You are asked to judge a particular characteristic of a speaker's English, and to which degree it corresponds to the adjectives given in the question.

Listen to the speaker and then circle the number which best corresponds to where you would put the speaker on the scale.

The instructions on how to answer other questions should be self-evident from the question – if you are confused do not hesitate to ask me for help.

**this page was the same for all 10 speakers*

Speaker 1

1. Would you say that the speaker's **ACCENT** of English is...?

Non-native

Native

0 1 2 3 4 5

2. Would you say that the speaker's **VOCABULARY** (the amount and complexity of the words they use) is...?

Poor

Rich

0 1 2 3 4 5

3. Would you say that the person's use of **GRAMMAR** is...?

Bad

Perfect

0 1 2 3 4 5

4. How **CONFIDENT** does the person sound in his/her use of English?

Very hesitant

Very confident

0 1 2 3 4 5

5. How easy is it to **UNDERSTAND** what the person is saying?

Difficult

Easy

0 1 2 3 4 5

6. If you had to guess, where would you say this person is from? (Region, country, continent? Be as specific or as broad as you like.)

7. Would you say that this person is a... (*Please choose one*):

☐ Native English speaker

☐ Non-native English speaker

8. Were there any factors in the person's speech that were especially important for you in making your decision?

9.2 APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS - AVERAGE SCORES AND TOTALS

	Acc	Vocab	Gram	Conf	Intel	TOTAL	NNES	NES	N/A	Comm
Lucy	4.09	3.04	3.64	4.35	4.38	3.90	22	63	0	26
Alex	2.73	2.71	3.25	2.98	4.02	3.14	67	18	0	39
Peter	0.98	2.12	2.45	2.15	2.56	2.05	81	3	1	31
Jack	4.34	3.80	3.93	4.32	4.42	4.16	16	68	1	30
Neil	2.82	2.85	3.06	2.99	3.09	2.96	54	30	1	23
Mark	1.91	2.89	2.87	3.11	2.20	2.60	72	12	1	16
Kevin	2.69	2.61	2.98	2.73	3.25	2.85	62	23	0	19
Kyle	4.09	3.74	3.71	4.11	3.94	3.92	23	62	0	23
Dave	2.72	3.07	3.31	3.31	3.88	3.26	65	18	2	23
John	4.54	4.18	4.05	3.30	4.30	4.07	6	78	0	21

Acc = accent*

Vocab = vocabulary*

Gram = grammar*

Conf = confidence*

Intel = intelligibility*

TOTAL = average of all factors

NNES = non-native English speaker**

NES = native English speaker**

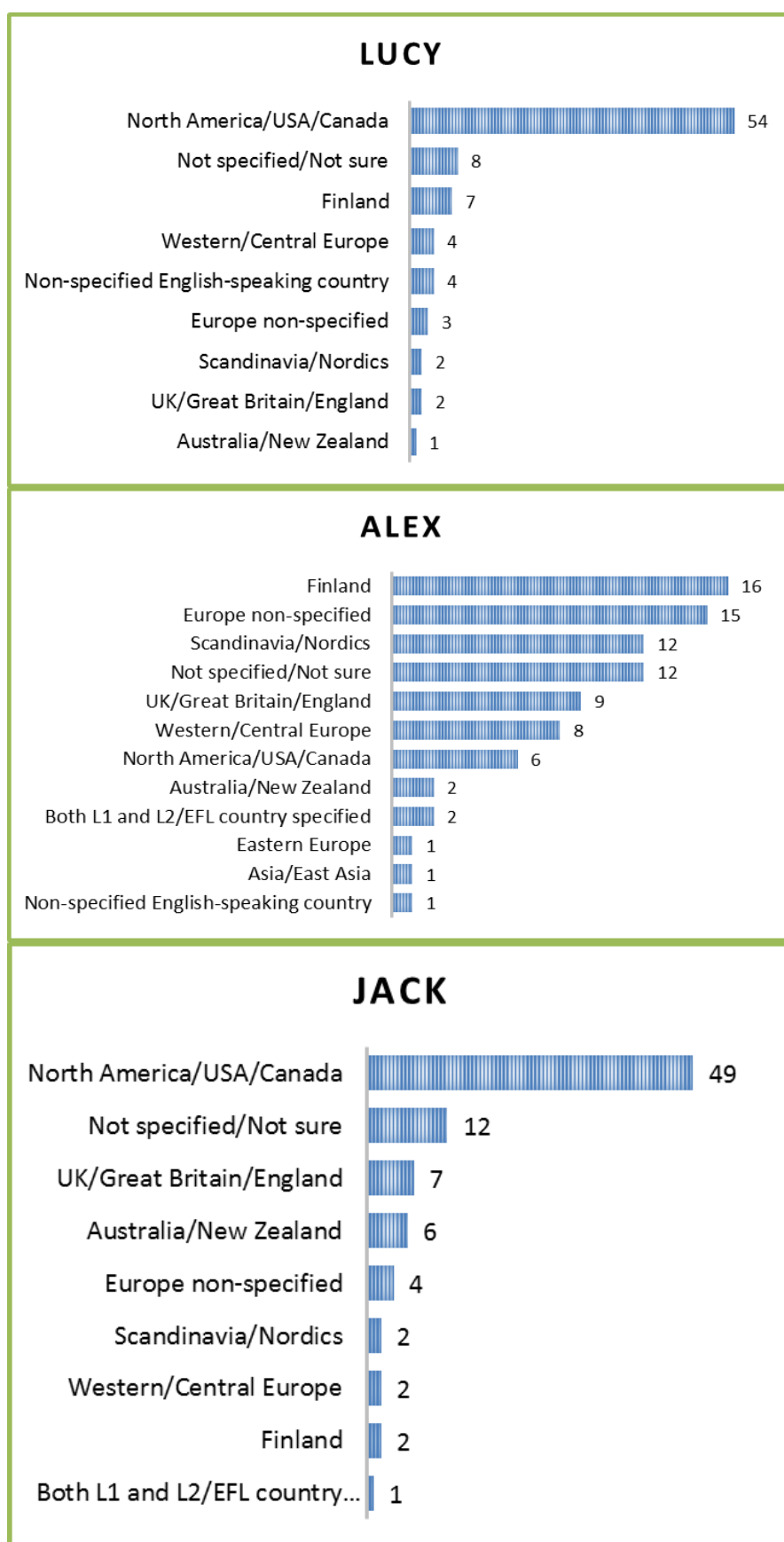
N/A = NES-NNES classification left blank

Comm = Number of respondents who answered final question

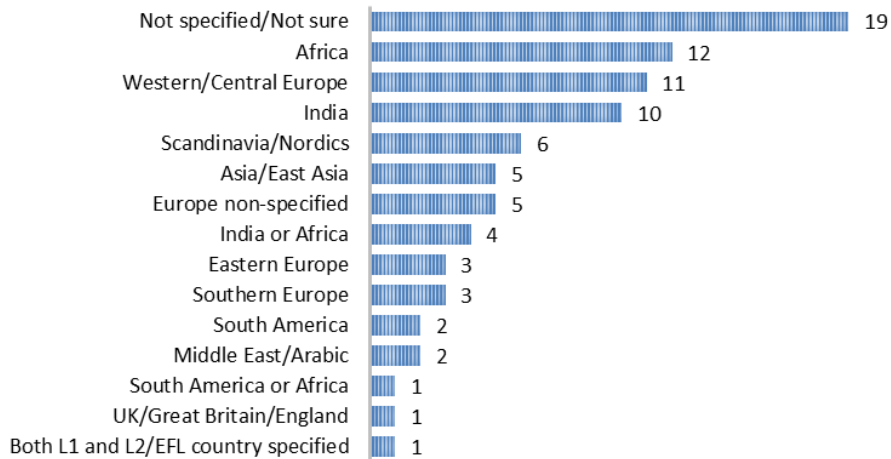
*average scores for speaker

**number of respondents who classified speaker as such

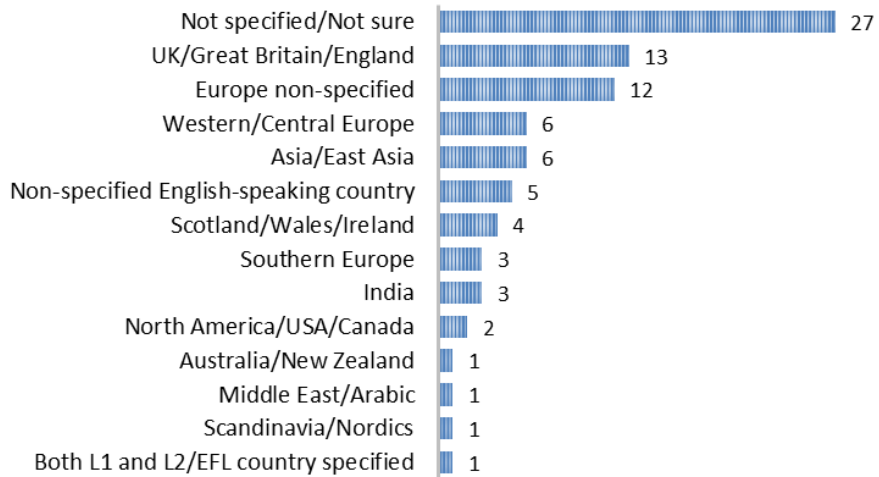
9.3 APPENDIX C: LIST OF PERCEIVED COUNTRIES/AREAS OF ORIGIN BY SPEAKER



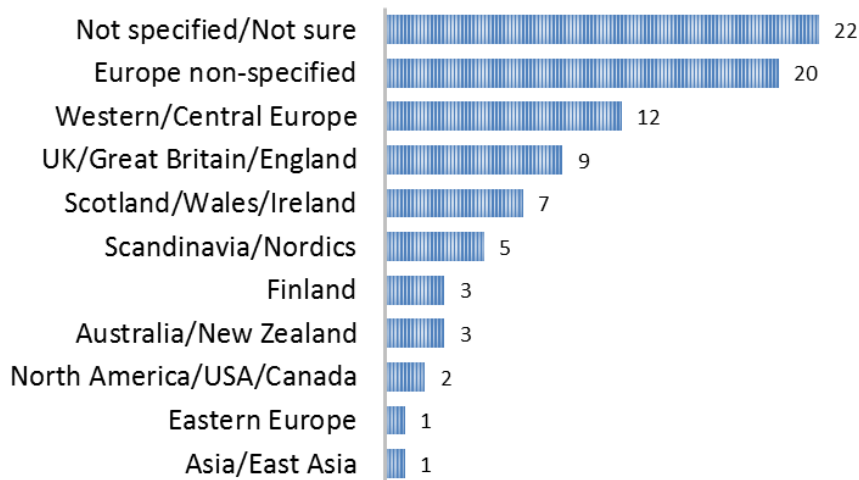
PETER



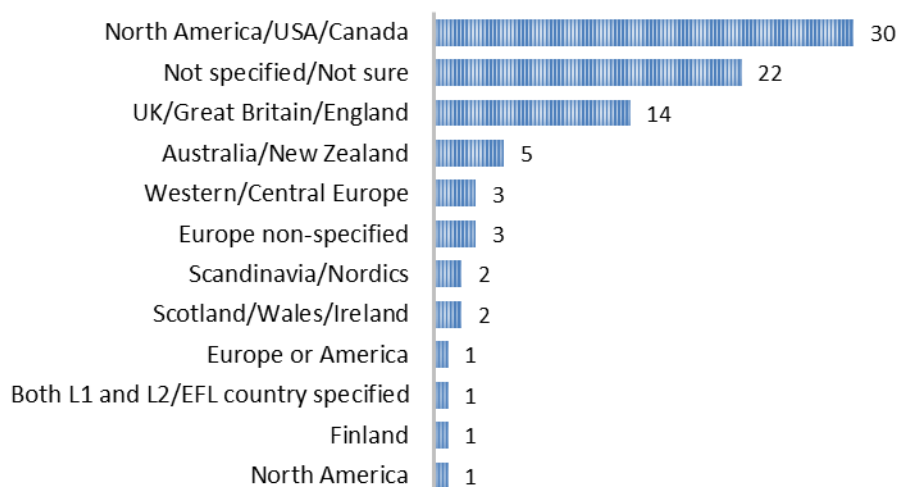
NEIL



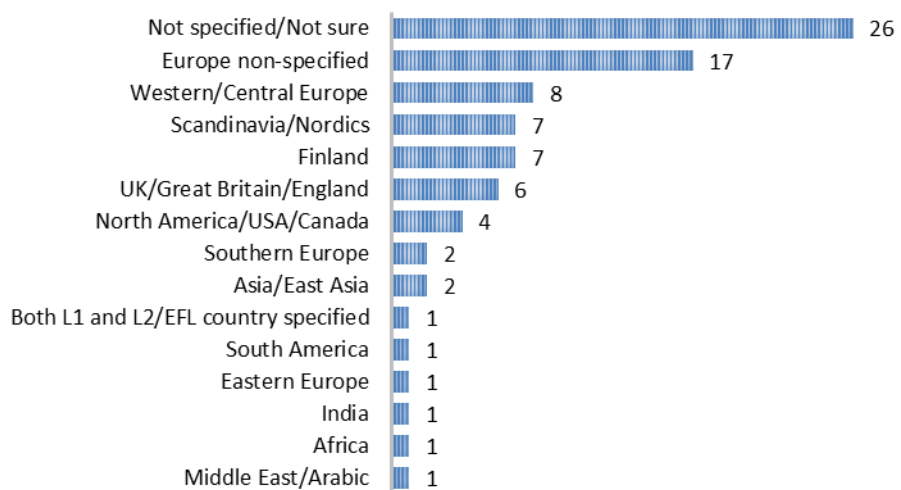
KEVIN



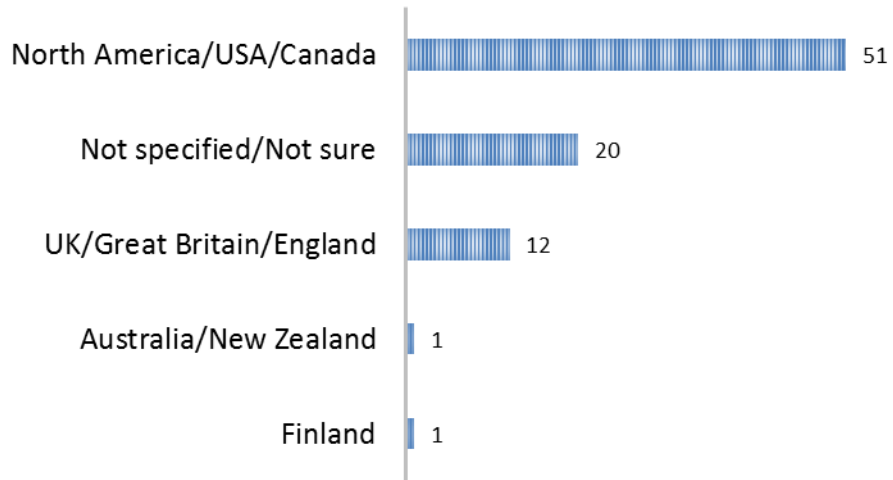
KYLE



DAVE



JOHN



MARK

